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MŌRĀN 'ETHŌ

13

FRANCIS ACHARYA (ABBOT)

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The Ritual of the Clothing of Monks



ST. EPHREM ECUMENICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE [SEERI]

BAKERHILL KOTTAYAM. 686001

INDIA

1999

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The Ritual of the Clothing of Monks in the Antiochean Tradition

FRANCIS ACHARYA (ABBOT)

St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute (SEERI)
Baker Hill, Kottayam-686 001 India

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Translated from the Syriac Text

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Francis Acharya (Abbot)

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A WORD OF APPRECIATION

I am extremely happy to see that the TAKSO D' TOULBOSHO D'DAIROYE (in Malayalam it is usually called Remban Pattom), published by the Syrian Catholic Patriarchate of Lebanon in 1952, has been for the first time translated into English and published as the RITUAL OF THE CLOTHING OF MONKS by very Rev. Fr. Francis Acharya. A very valuable commentary by him has been added to the text. I fully endorse the statement of Professor Sebastian Brock of the Oxford University, regarding the commentary of the text: "It appears to be a wonderful piece of work, and I feel that the fact that the commentary is essentially 'practical rather than academic actually enhances the value of the work'".

The candidate comes forward to receive the Remban Pattam (the monastic ordination) with a deep sense of sinfulness, and with a thirst for purification in true conversion in order to draw near to the Lord. This is the main theme of the first part of the commentary, namely of the Liturgy of the word. The author describes the first part of the commentary as an exercise of narrative theology, unfolding the Church Service from the initial Doxology to the last concluding prayer. The commentaries on the Responsorial Psalmody, on the service of the Incense and on the Bible lessons are extremely useful for meditation. The commentary on the Mystery initiations in the third section of part one of the commentary is very helpful to understand the various actions in the service such as Sealing, Tonsure, Clothing, Holy Bath, etc, which otherwise would seem to look a bit strange to a modern observer of the ceremony. In the second part, the author looks at the service as a drama of redemption originating in the account of creation and the fall, and unfolding until it reaches out to the Parousia.

In the third and concluding part the author adopts a synthetic approach in order to bring out the nature and the

distinctive features of the monastic charism in the Antiochean tradition. The author concludes his commentary by summing up the prominent features (he mentions eight of them) of the Clothing of Monks in the Antiochean Tradition.

The Homily of Moses Bar Kepha on the clothing of the monks given in the book will, I am sure, serve as a source of meditation, to be repeated, by the candidate, later on in life.

I am sure that this valuable publication will be a source book not only for the liturgical service but for the candidates who are clothed as Monks.

Geevarghese Mar Timotheos

DEDICATION

Understand, my sons,
what is the monastic charism – monachatus –
and the doctrine of this way of life.
And let it be known to all who are here.
The practice of the monastic charism
is older than the ordination of the monastic habit.

Indeed with our forefathers there was no habit:
Enoch, Noah, Melchizedek,

Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Daniel and many others practised
continence, abstinence, righteousness, justice and holiness.
Some of them even kept virginity.

And when Christ the Saviour of all appeared,
John the Baptist and the holy apostles and evangelists
and their followers
were endowed with the same holy monastic charism
and, with it, they lived for God.

Later, in the time of Anthony the Great,
the Lord Himself, with other graces,
also gave the monastic habit as the monk's garment.
And all who were clothed in it while being worthy of it,
were called monks and their dwelling places monasteries,
names conveying the austerity of their way of life.

Moses Bar Kepha,
*Homily given after the Service of the Clothing
of those who have received the
holy habit of monkhood.*

وكلها لله في د. الله، وحده صناد

Beth Harbutho Library

[illegible]

Anyone who asks for this volume, to read, collate, or copy from it, and who appropriates it to himself or herself, or cuts anything out of it, should realize that s/he will have to give answer before God's awesome tribunal as if s/he had robbed a sanctuary. Let such a person be held anathema and receive no forgiveness until the book is returned. So be it, Amen! And anyone who removes these anathemas, digitally or otherwise, shall himself receive them in double.

FOREWORD

The Syriac text of the Ritual of the Clothing of Monks translated here was published by the Syrian Catholic Patriarchate, Sharfeh, Lebenon, in 1952, in the **Book of Priestly Ordinations**. It has its place there next to the ordinations of bishops, priests and deacons. A Latin version is found in the **Pontificale iuxta Ritum Syrorum Occidentalium id est Antiochiae**, edited by J. M. Voste, O. P., for the Congregation for Oriental Churches, Rome, in 1941. It is found there immediately after the Ritual of Baptism.

The Clothing of Monks is known as a **mystery**, *rozo* in Syriac. This is the word used by the Syrian Churches in their biblical and sacramental theology, to designate the secret, hidden action or intervention of God by which He communicates Himself to us, even gives Himself to us, as in baptism, chrismation and holy eucharist.

In the Antiochean tradition God's work of salvation accomplished by our Lord Jesus Christ, His Son, is set forth in the Churches and communicated in the ongoing course of history by the Holy Spirit. At the Eucharistic celebration, the priest and the assembled congregation ask the Father to send down the Life-giving Holy Spirit to change the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ to be shared by all. At the Clothing of the Monk the Celebrant and even the Candidate pray that the Holy Spirit may descend on him, purify him and be preserved in him as a pledge of life divine.

I cannot conclude this foreword without expressing my gratitude to Prof. S. Brock of the Oriental Institute, Oxford, who helped me for the translation by clarifying subtle passages. And further, when I was diffident regarding the propriety of

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offering the commentary for publication, after just dipping into it he wrote:

It appears to me a wonderful piece of work, and I feel that the fact the commentary is essentially 'practical' rather than 'academic' actually enhances the value of the work.

And later, when he had read the whole text through, he added:
It all coheres very well, especially with the new conclusion. ... It will be excellent to have this published by SEERI. I find it all most illuminating and helpful, and I am sure others will too.

The distinguished professor of Syriac truly has a charism to guide and encourage his students.

September 14, 1997

Francis Acharya

The Ritual of the Clothing of Monks

The Clothing in the habit of monkhood is celebrated in the nave of the church. During the vestition of the Celebrant for the Qurbana, Old Testament lessons are read. Then the celebrant assisted by priests and deacons, stands before the altar, on the qestromo, the step from where the Word of God is proclaimed. Clothes, scissors and cross are kept on the northern side. The candidate comes to the step of the qestromo before the celebrant and prostrates, rising only at the end of the Opening Prayer.

Rs Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

Co And on us weak and sinful servants, mercy and compassion in both worlds for ever. Amen.

Rs O Holy One,
 and Lover of the holy ones,
 who take delight in the holy ones,
 God Holy above all,
 receive this Your servant set apart for You in holiness.
Give him the grace, in this unblemished way of life, in solitude,
 to be made worthy to draw near to Your Godhead
 by his good works, well pleasing to Your Godhead
 all the days of his life,
 like Samuel who was found worthy
 to dwell in Your holy tabernacle,
 in uprightness and purity of heart,
 for the praise of the Adorable Name of Your Godhead,
 Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for ever.

Co Amen.

Abbreviations: Rish Dairo : Rs Archdeacon : Dn
 Candidate : Ca Community : Co

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The Rish Dairo intones Psalm 51. Be gracious to me... and the Community proceeds with the Psalm while the response is recited by the Candidate about to be clothed.

Rs Be gracious to me, O God, in Your goodness.

Co In Your infinite graciousness blot out all my sins.

Ca Be forgiveness to me, O God,
You who alone are full of mercy.
Receive me like the prodigal son.
Have mercy on me !

Co O wash me more and more from my guilt
and cleanse me from my sin.
My offences truly I know them;
my sin is always before me.

Ca At Your door, O God I knock
who open Your door to penitents.
Open the door of Your mercy, O Lord.
Have mercy on me !

Co Against You, You alone have I sinned.
What is evil in Your sight I have done.
You are just when you pass sentence on me,
blameless when You give judgement.
You know I was born in guilt,
a sinner from the moment of conception.

Ca In the waves of sin I have sunk as in the sea.
O Lord, stretch out to me Your right hand as to Simon.
Have mercy on me !

Co Yet, since You love sincerity of heart,
teach me the secrets of wisdom.
Purify me with hyssop until I am clean,
wash me until I am whiter than snow.

Ca I spent all my time in sin, O God.
Let me not be estranged from the service of Your Godhead.

- Co Make me hear rejoicing and gladness,
that the bones You have crushed may thrill.
From my sins turn away Your face
and blot out all my guilt.
- Ca By the blood flowing from Your side, Lord God,
I pray You, draw me from the mire of my sins.
Have mercy on me!
- Co A pure heart create in me, O God,
put a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from Your presence,
nor deprive me of Your Holy Spirit.
- Ca O Lord, You know our nature,
how it is inclined to transgressions and sins.
I have sinned against You.
Forgive me my sin, O God.
Have mercy on me!
- Co Give me again the joy of Your help.
With a spirit of fervour sustain me,
that I may show transgressors Your ways
and sinners may return to You.
- Ca Christ who by Your mercy, for the sake of sinners,
underwent the passion in Your flesh,
have compassion on me, a sinner,
I seek refuge in You.
Have mercy on me!
- Co O rescue me, God, my helper,
and my tongue shall ring out Your goodness.
O Lord, open my lips
and my mouth shall declare Your praise.
- Ca As You did pardon the sinful woman who came to You,
O God, pardon me all my sins and transgressions.
Have mercy on me!
- Co For in sacrifice You take no delight,
burnt offering from me You would refuse,
my sacrifice, a contrite spirit,
a humbled, contrite heart You will not spurn.

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Ca My sins have gone over my head,
but I know that Your mercy is great.
Let my transgressions be pardoned,
and I will praise You, O Lord.
Have mercy on me !

Co Let it be your pleasure to show favour to Zion:
to build anew the walls of Jerusalem.
Then only shall You delight in appointed sacrifices,
burnt offerings wholly consumed,
and gifts offered upon Your altar.

Ca I have sinned against You, Lord.
In my weakness I have committed evil before You.
Sprinkle me with Your hyssop, my Lord,
and I will be purified.
Have mercy on me!

Rs Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the
Holy Spirit.

Co From age to age and for ever. Amen.

Rs Threefold praise to the One who is Three and is one God,
the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,
one True God. Glory to Him.

May God, to whose Holy Covenant you have come to
adhere with readiness, in the fervour of love,
make you worthy to offer praise and glory to Him,
by a becoming way of life, in uprightness,
with the labour of good works, orthodox faith
and in a manner well pleasing to Him, now and
for ever.

Co Amen.

Psalm 63

Co O God, You are my God, for You *I* long.

Ca God, help me, for the storms and tempests of the sins
I have committed encompass me. Be a harbour to me,

that I may not be drowned in the ocean of sins.

I seek conversion.

Stretch out Your hand to me as to Peter.

Have mercy on me!

Co For You my soul is thirsting.
My body pines for You
like a dry, weary land without water.

Ca You let the strong to fall,
but to the weak who call upon You
Your right hand is a help. By Your grace,
draw me who are afflicted and wounded by sin.
You are the hope of those who are without hope.
I pray You, O Merciful One, have compassion on me.
Have mercy on me!

Co So I gaze on You in the sanctuary
to see Your strength and Your glory.

Ca O God, Your love prompted You
and You created me from the dust.
You clothed me in Your likeness and Your image.
In the Paradise of blessedness,
You gave me power to eat and enjoy.
But by my own will I fell from that height.
In Your mercy lift me up.
Have compassion, have pity on me.

Co For Your love is better than life,
my lips will speak Your praise.

Ca By his wicked and bitter jealousy the Enemy deceived me
to fall from the height of Paradise.
Since I listened to him, in justice I was found guilty.
Lord, have compassion on Your image
enslaved by the Evil One.
Make me return to Your fold.
Turn to me. Have mercy on me!

Co So I will bless You all my life,
in your name I will lift up my hands.

Ca You justified the sinner. Lord God,
and in Your mercy, You sanctified the unholy nations.

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To the woman suffering from an issue of blood
who approached You, in Your grace, You gave health.
With Your hyssop that cleanses all.
cleanses me who am wicked and full of blemishes;
You are He who absolve sinners from their
transgressions.

In Your love have pity on me.

Co My soul shall be filled as with a banquet,
my mouth shall praise You with joy.

Ca O Merciful God, I am drowning!
Draw me from the sea of sins and transgressions.
In Your mercy, raise me lest I be lost in the abyss
of sins.

I wait for Your salvation, O Merciful Lord.
Lord of Mercies' have compassion on me!
Have mercy on me!

Co On my bed I remember You.
On You I muse through the night.

Ca God, have compassion on me
The Enemy enslaved me out of wicked and bitter
jealousy.
By his snares and flatteries he has caught me.
Deliver me from him, O Lord,
O Merciful One, sanctify me by Your grace and save me.
Have pity on me, as on the publican.

Co For You have been my help;
in the shadow of Your wings I rejoice.

Ca Out of jealousy the Evil One enslaved me.
He destroyed my freedom
and corrupted the purity that was given to me.
I was polluted by the corruption of the world
and I have become sheer weeds,
In the mercy of Your goodness, my Saviour,
bring me back to the way of Your commandments.
And may I see Your compassion!
Have mercy on me!

Co My soul clings to You:
Your right hand holds me fast.

- Ca You cured the paralytic, O Lord God.
In Your mercy, You justified the publican.
And to the thief who put his trust in You,
in Your goodness, You promised the Paradise.
Because You are the refuge of all penitents, I pray You,
O Merciful One, in Your mercy, have compassion on me.
- Co Those who seek to destroy my life
shall sink into the depths of Sheol.
- Ca Rich One, never failing Fountain of Mercy for Your servants
O Lord, be not angry at the pride of Your servant.
You alone are merciful, showing mercy to sinners.
- Co They shall be given over to the power of Justice.
But the king shall rejoice in God.
- Ca I call at the door of Your goodness,
O Lover of penitents, and from Your treasury
I ask for compassion and mercy.
O Merciful Lord, in Your goodness,
have compassion on me and make me live.
- Co All who call on His Name shall be blessed,
but the mouth of liars shall be silenced.
- Ca Our Saviour, who in Your Gospel promised hope
to the penitent, in Your mercy have compassion
on Your servant who is lost. In Your goodness,
answer our requests, O Glorious One, full of mercy.
- Rs Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.
- Co From age to age and for ever. Amen.
- Rs Glory to Your Being.
 Praise to Your Lordship.
 Exaltation to Your Godhead,
 Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
 One Being.
 One Godhead in three persons.
 One Being confessed as One.
- Have compassion on us in Your goodness and have mercy on us.

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Psalm 84

- Co How lovely is Your dwelling place, Lord,
God of all cosmic forces.
My soul is longing and yearning,
is yearning for the courts of the Lord.
My heart and my soul ring out their joy
to God, the living God.
- Ca In the monastery to which I was called
and the community which is dear to me,
receive with love my nothingness,
for I seek refuge in your prayer.
- Co The sparrow herself finds a home
and the swallow a nest for her brood.
She lays her young by Your altars,
Lord of hosts, my King and my God.
- Ca O God, whose door is open equally to the good
and the wicked, open to me the door of Your mercy
and receive my repentance.
- Co They are happy, who dwell in Your house,
for ever singing Your praise.
They are happy, whose strength is in You,
in whose hearts are the roads to Zion.
- Ca In the snares of the Evil One I am entangled,
the world enslaved me in its desires.
Now, since I have turned to Your mercy,
let me not return sorrowing.
- Co As they go through the Bitter Valley
they make it a place of springs,
the autumn rain covers it with blessings.
They walk with ever growing strength,
they will see the God of gods in Zion.
- Ca Brotherhood and all members of the monastic order,
and fathers in whom I have taken refuge,
offer prayers for me to God that He may have mercy on me.
- Co O Lord, God of all cosmic forces, hear my prayer,
give ear, O God of Jacob.

Turn Your eyes, O God, our shield,
look on the face of Your anointed.

Ca Christ who sacrificed Yourself on the Cross
for the sake of sinners,
protect me, Lord, by Your Cross.
I here bow before Your Majesty.

Co One day within Your courts
is better than a thousand elsewhere.
The threshold of the house of God
I prefer to the dwellings of the wicked.

Ca I have given up passing pleasures
to put on the likeness of Your passion.
On the day of Your coming,
give me a portion in the inheritance of Your holy ones.

Co For the Lord God is a rampart, a shield;
He will give us His favour and glory.
The Lord will not refuse any good
to those who walk without blame.

Rs The Virgin Mother of God, the Prophets,
the Apostles and the Martyrs be to you
like a wall of protection all the days of your life.

Co Lord, God of all cosmic forces,
happy the man who trusts in You.

Ca Let my iniquities be made clean by Your hyssop.
Let my blemishes be wiped off by Your blood.
Let the secret movements of my thoughts
be sanctified by Your body.

Rs Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

Co From age to age and for ever. Amen.

Rs He is adorable, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
the Mystery of the Trinity.
From the heavenly ones and the mortal ones
adoration and praise.

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Mary's Hymn of thanksgiving

Rs And Mary said:

Ca My soul glorifies the Lord,
My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.
He looks on His servant in her nothingness;
henceforth all ages will call me blessed.
The Almighty works marvels for me. Holy His name!
His mercy is from age to age, on those who revere Him.

Co He puts forth His arm in strength
and scatters the proud-hearted.
He casts the mighty from their thrones
and raises the lowly.
He fills the starving with good things,
sends the rich away empty.
He protects Israel, His servant,
remembering His mercy,
the mercy promised to our fathers,
for Abraham and his seed for ever.

Ca Let the Spirit breathe upon me,
who by his descent removes our foulness
and renews our old nature.

Rs By His overshadowing you, may He burn away
the luscious growth of sin, and instead pour grace
upon you, so that you may be transformed
and give fitting thanks.
Truly, we owe a debt of thanks.

Ca With the joyful sounds of chant
ascending to Him who is on high,
let us again, together, exalt in all sincerity,
with spiritual songs, Him who purifies us,
and removes our old habits of sin.
Truly, we owe a debt of thanks.

Rs O Gentle Mary, to make to shine again our nature
which was wallowing in the mire of sin
and obscured by the deceitfulness of idols,
you revealed it in your Son.

Therefore, by the power of your prayer,
draw again His radiance upon us,
to dispel the gloom that darkens us.
Truly, we owe a debt of thanks.

Psalm 113

Co Praise, O servants of the Lord.
Praise the Name of the Lord!
May the Name of the Lord be blessed,
both now and for evermore!
From the rising of the sun to its setting,
great is the Name of the Lord.
High above all nations is the Lord,
above the heavens His glory.
Who is like the Lord, our God,
who has risen on high to His throne
yet stoops from the heights to look down,
to look down upon heaven and earth!
From the dunghill He raises the poor,
to set him in the company of princes.
To the childless wife He gives a home
and gladdens her heart with children.
Praise the Lord!

Ca O Lord, I ask forgiveness for the sins I have committed.
Forgive them, in Your graciousness.
For You are He who cleanses the guilty.
Halleluia, halleluia.

Co O Lord full of mercy, be merciful to Your servant,
for it was out of love that You came to the world
for the salvation of Your creation.
Halleluia, halleluia.

Ca You all, my brothers and fathers,
the community which I love, ask mercy for my weakness.
I seek refuge in Your prayer.
Halleluia, halleluia.

I was a diligent servant to sin and to evil habits.
Oh! what a shame is kept for me and those like me.
Halleluia, halleluia.

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See, I pray for pardon. In Your mercy answer my prayers,
for You alone are righteous who pardon the debts of sinners.
Halleluia, halleluia.

Rs Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

Co From age to age and for ever. Amen.

Ca With a broken heart I make supplication to You,
Good One full of mercy. In Your compassion forgive
my transgressions, for You are He who forgives sinners.
Halleluia, halleluia.

Dn (Stoumen qalos!) Let us stand well!

Co (Kurie eleison!) Lord have mercy;

Rs (N'sale qulan...)

Let us all pray and beg for mercy and compassion.

Co Merciful Lord, have mercy on us and help us!

Rs Praise, thanksgiving, glory, honour and exaltation, continually and without ceasing at all times may we be worthy to offer to the Remitter of debts and Forgiver of sins, who washes away iniquities and cleanses all defilements, who is remote and beyond all human thought, the Wisdom and Radiance of His Father, who set out as a good shepherd to seek the lost sheep and found them for life everlasting, who emptied Himself for our salvation and became man from a human being, uniting His Godhead with our manhood Self-existent Son of the Father who confined Himself in His creation and became man from the Virgin without changing from being God, the Creator who made heaven by His word, and by the breath of His mouth all the cosmic forces, to Him glory and blessing from all His creatures, at this time and on all feasts for ever.

Christ our God, You are great in gifts and overflowing with graces, benevolent in mercy, longsuffering, wonderfully gracious; Your mercy overflows on those who revere You and on those who turn to You; You do not like the death of the sinner but that he return to You and live. Only-begotten of the Father, You pour graces and good gifts;

You pardoned the people's foolish ways by the prayers of Moses and cleansed his sister Miriam from her leprosy; You saved Rahab, and pardoned David's guilt because of the humble prayer he offered to You; You saved Jonah and liberated Manasseh (2 Ch. 33:13).

Accept now the prayers and supplications of Your servants who, with fear and trembling, are brought in the presence of Your Lordship. Send on them the gift of the Holy Spirit, O Lord our God, who for our salvation were raised on the wood of the Cross and You sanctified the air. You descended into Sheol and joined combat with Death and raised the human nature sunken in the passions of sins, carrying it on Your shoulders, O Lover of Humankind. For the joy and gladness of this, You invited all the heavenly hosts, O Good Shepherd who came to call sinners, and turned them unto You. In Your gentleness, receive the penitents, protect the just in Your mercy; raise those who have fallen and set firm those who stand. Make to return those who have gone astray, gather those who are dispersed. In Your love for humankind give to everyone that which is good and useful.

And this, your servant, set apart from the world to draw near to You, make him worthy of Your mercy, of the pardon of sins and of seeing You with unveiled face. Deliver him from snares and stumbling blocks, from temptations to sin and from all devices of the Adversary and of the Devil and of wicked men. Free him from evil passions and from all impure thoughts which are not pleasing to You. Keep him in purity, in holiness, in chastity, in modesty, and in all which is pleasing to Your will. Save him from being a cause of scandal, or offence, or ruin, or harm, and of whatever sin to himself or to his fellow-beings, to those of outside and those of inside. But strengthen him with Your ineffable grace, You who take pleasure in the life of human beings, that he may become a cause of glory to Your Holy Name.

O Lord, have compassion on the people gathered here in Your Holy Name, while we, with him, are pouring our hearts in Your presence. O my Lord, let not our sins and wickedness enter into Your holy heart which does not remember wickedness. As human beings we have sinned. As creatures of dust we have

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committed offences, We have failed like wicked servants, but You, O Lord, pardon as God. Have compassion as the Merciful One, Set free as the Good One. My Lord, do not forsake us for ever. Do not turn away Your face from us. Do not let our heads bow down to the earth on account of the evil we have committed. Let us not come to shame, to weeping, to derision before the choirs of angels and before the people. My Lord, do not fill us with shame everlasting, but give us confidence and make us stand at Your right side...

Let Your grace extend its wings and protect us from the threatening of justice, so that, saved by Your Holy Name and sharing in this salvation, we may be worthy to offer the praise of victory to the Multitude of Your Immeasurable Mercies, and to Your Blessed and Blissful Father who has sent You for our salvation, and to Your Spirit, Holy above all, Good and Adorable, Life-giving and Consubstantial to You, now and always and for ever. Amen.

Co O Son of God, let the sheep come to your fold.
A sinner, he knocks at the door of Your mercy.
Receive him, O Lord, in the abundance of Your goodness,
and put again on him the sign of the Cross.
Let him carry Your yoke which is pleasant
and Your burden which is light.
With the wise and earnest virgins,
may he be made worthy of Your bridal chamber,
halleluia, halleluia.

Co Christ, Bridegroom who betrothed the human soul to Yourself,
and saved it by Your blood, and freed it by Your Cross,
and made it beautiful by the abundance of Your ordinances,
and promised it life eternal, this soul which is betrothed
to Your crucifixion, give it to do good works
and make it worthy of Your bridal chamber.
Halleluia, halleluia.

Ca Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.
O God, who open Your door to those who knock at it,
open to me the door of Your mercy, for I bow before You.
Protect me as the apple of Your eye and keep me,
that the Evil One may not harm me.

Let Your graciousness set out to seek me.

Let Your mercy protect me. Let me be a guest
at the banquet prepared for Your beloved.

Halleluia, halleluia.

From age to age and for ever. Amen.

Flock of spiritual sheep who have brought me to His fold,
ask mercy for my weakness, for I love Your company.

Co May our Lord be to you a stronghold,
and by Him may you be saved from all harm.
May our Lord treat you alike with all those who did His will,
that He may rejoice in you and you in Him,
in the life which does not pass away.

Halleluia, halleluia.

Prayer for the Burning of Incense

Our Lord Jesus Christ, true hope of Your Church, trust
of Your faithful, whose door is open to the penitents and who
receive the sinners returning to You, open, O Lord, the door of
Your mercy to this your servant and receive him, for he bowed
his neck to take upon him Your sweet yoke. Let Your Holy
Spirit come and rest on him. Pardon all his failings. Count him
among Your flock. Let him be a lamb in Your sheepfold that
with all the children of the Church and holy disciples, he may
praise You and Your Father and Your Holy Spirit, now and at
all times and for ever. Amen.

Zoomoro: The Holy Spirit sang through David a song of praise
and salvation in the habitation of the just.

The Bible Lessons are read

Gn 12: 1-9 The Lord said to Abram, Go from your
country and your kindred and your father's house to the land
that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I
will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be
a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who
curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the
earth shall be blessed.

So Abram went as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Har'an. Abram took His wife Sar'ai and his brother's son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Har'an; and they set forth to go to the land, of Ca'naan. When they had come to the land of Ca'naan, Abram passed through the land to the place at She'chem, to the oak of Mo'reh. At that time the Ca'naan-ites were in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abram, and said, To your offspring I will give this land. So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Beth'el on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the Lord and invoked the name of the Lord. Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negeb.

Nu 6: 1-8 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the Israelites and say to them: When either men or women make a special vow, the vow of a nazirite, to separate themselves to the Lord, they shall separate themselves from wine and strong drink; they shall drink no wine vinegar or other vinegar, and shall not drink any grape juice or eat grapes, fresh or dried. All their days as nazirites they shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, not even the seeds or the skins.

All the days of their nazirite vow no razor shall come upon the head; until the time is completed for which they separate themselves to the Lord, they shall be holy; they shall let the locks of the head grow long.

All the days that they separate themselves to the Lord they shall not go near a corpse, Even if their father or mother, brother or sister, should die, they may not defile themselves; because their consecration to God is upon the head. All their days as nazirites they are holy to the Lord.

Dt 30: 15-20A See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns

away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days.

Si 2: 1-11 My child, when you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for testing. Set your heart right and be steadfast, and do not be impetuous in time of calamity. Cling to Him and do not depart, so that your last days may be prosperous. Accept whatever befalls you, and in times of humiliation be patient. For gold is tested in the fire, and those found acceptable, in the furnace of humiliation. Trust in Him, and He will help you; make your ways straight, and hope in Him. You who fear the Lord, wait for His mercy; do not stray, or else you may fall. You who fear the Lord, trust in Him, and your reward will not be lost. You who fear the Lord, hope for good things, for lasting joy and mercy. Consider the generations of old and see: has anyone trusted in the Lord and been disappointed? Or has anyone persevered in the fear of the Lord and been forsaken? Or has anyone called upon Him and been neglected? For the Lord is compassionate and merciful; He forgives sins and saves in time of distress.

Is 18: 1-7 Ah, land of whirring wings beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, sending ambassadors by the Nile in vessels of papyrus on the waters! Go, you swift messengers, to a nation tall and smooth, to a people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide. All you inhabitants of the world, you who live on the earth, when a signal is raised on the mountains, look; When a trumpet is blown, listen! For thus the Lord said to me: I will quietly look from my dwelling like clear heat in sunshine, like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest. For before the harvest, when the blossom is over and the flower becomes a ripening grape, he will cut off the shoots with pruning hooks, and the spreading branches he will hew away. They shall all be left to the

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birds of prey of the mountains and to the animals of the earth. And the birds of prey will summer on them, and all the animals of the earth will winter on them. At that time gifts will be brought to the Lord of hosts from a people tall and smooth, from a people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide, to Mount Zion, the place of the name of the Lord of hosts.

Lam 3: 25-36 The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul that seeks Him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord: It is good for one to bear the yoke in youth, to sit alone in silence when the Lord has imposed it, to put one's mouth to the dust to give one's cheek to the smiter, and be filled with insults. For the Lord will not reject for ever. Although He causes grief, He will have compassion according to the abundance of His steadfast love; for He does not willingly afflict or grieve anyone. When all the prisoners of the land are crushed under foot, when human rights are perverted in the presence of the Most High, when one's case is subverted - does the Lord not see it?

Zoomoro : Chosen Apostles who were sent by God into the world, preached the Gospel of His Son among the peoples and proclaimed the kingdom of heaven to the end of the earth, saying, Blessed are those who believe.

1 P 1:13-25 Beloved, prepare therefore your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, You shall be holy, for I am holy.

If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile. You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the

end of the ages for your sake. Through Him you have come to trust in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God.

Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God. For all flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord endures for ever. That word is the good news that was announced to you.

Zoomoro : I heard Paul, the blessed Apostle, say: If anyone shall come and preach to you anything other than we have preached to you; or if an angel should come from heaven, let him be banned from the Church. Behold, diverse, teachings spring up on all sides; blessed is he who begins and ends in the teaching of God.

Col 3:1-17 Beloved, if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. But now you must get rid of all such things – anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have discarded the old nature with its deeds and have put on the new nature, which is constantly renewed in the image of its Creator and made to grow in the knowledge of God. In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

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Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Houlolo Halleluia, halleluia. Guide me in reverence for You, Lord, and in Your holiness. Halleluia.

Dn In silence and awe and reverence let us listen and hear the proclamation of the life-giving word of God which is read to us from the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Rs Peace be with you all!

Co And with you also.

Rs The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ the message of life according to the Evangelist Luke which proclaims life and salvation to the world.

Co Blessed is He who has come and is to come in the name of the Lord. Glory to the Father who sent His Son for our salvation. Adoration to the Spirit who leads us to the fulness of truth.

Rs In the time of our Lord, God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, the Word of Life who was God and took flesh of the Holy Virgin Mary, these things came to pass.

Co We believe and confess it.

Lk 14:25–35, 15:1–10 Now large crowds were travelling with Jesus; and He turned and said to them, Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower,

does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, This fellow began to build and was not able to finish. Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. So therefore, none of you can become My disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; they throw it away. Let anyone with ears to hear listen!

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to Him. And the Pharisees and the Scribes were grumbling and saying, This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.

So He told them this parable: Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbours, saying to them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost. Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost. Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

Then the Deacon makes this announcement

Dn Let us all stand well and with earnestness and voices pleasing to God, let us answer and say:

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Co Kurie eleison.

Dn Christ our God, who are an unsounded depth of goodness, giver of great gifts to humankind, who when You saw our guilty race fallen away from Your love, in an abyss deprived of light and prone to be darkened by carnal desires, again made it worthy to be joined with You under Your sweet yoke, grant us to mend our separations and to restore our divisions to the one oneness in the likeness of Your Being, we beseech You:

Co Kurie eleison.

Dn Christ our God, who are served by choirs of fire and spirit in a way befitting God, and who in love for humankind came down for the lost sheep, and were personally united with our body of flesh, and dealt with men and took on Your shoulders the lost sheep to bring it back and make it enter Your fold, grant also to this Your servant who chose Your holy yoke, that by it, with You, he may be united in the bond of the Holy Spirit, and progressing in a life of purity without confusion, be joined with the ranks of the holy ones, we beseech You:

Co Kurie eleison.

Dn Christ our God, who taught us in Your holy Gospel saying: Everyone who does not take his cross willingly on his shoulders and come after Me is not worthy to be My disciple, strengthen this Your servant enkindled with the fervour of love, who joyfully fulfils Your commandments and comes to carry Your cross cheerfully; strengthen him with the whole armour of Your Holy Spirit, so that he may quench the flaming arrows of the Evil One and let him remain unconquered by his hostile actions, we beseech You:

Co Kurie eleison.

Dn Christ our God, who by Your ineffable love for humankind showed us the way to the royal road leading to the blessed life, and who taught us in Your saving Gospel to travel on it without wavering, make this Your servant worthy to complete his journey without turning aside,

and to continue in a life pleasing to You, we beseech You:

Co Kurie eleison.

Dn Christ our God, to whom the tears of the penitent are dear, and who desire the salvation of the wicked, Good one, who open your door to the penitent, and whose hand is stretched out to draw up the drowning, open the door of your graciousness to this your servant bowing before you; cause to flow and direct upon him the affluent streams of your everlasting mercies; cleanse and purify him from all foulness and sores of sin, we beseech you:

Co Kurie eleison.

Dn For the tranquillity, peace and concord of the whole world. May God cause to dwell His peace and tranquillity on His people and on His Church, in the four quarters of the world. May He remove from this monastery, from this place and its inhabitants, all that which is displeasing to Him.

For the remembrance of her who is worthy of the blessing of all the generations of the world, the holy, glorious, ever Virgin Mary, Mother of God.

For the remembrance of the Prophets, Apostles, Martyrs, Confessors, for the holy Fathers and Orthodox Doctors, we beseech you:

Co Kurie eleison.

Dn For the remembrance of our holy fathers:
our holy father... pope of Rome, and our father... our archbishop, and our father... our bishop, and with them our rish dairo from whose hands the habit is given to this brother. And for the remembrance of all the faithful departed, we cry and say three times:

Co Kurie eleison, kurie eleison, kurie eleison.

Rs Christ our God, make us worthy to persevere in labouring in your holy vineyard, and with the sacred companies of your saints to go to meet You at Your Second Coming, to offer you praise and thanksgiving for ever and ever.

Co Amen.

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Admonition read by the Rish Dairo to him who is to be shorn

Beloved, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ taught us in His holy Gospel: No one who puts his hand on the plough-handle and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God (Lk 9.62). Now, brother, behold before whom you are standing! You are offering your vows and promises not before mortal and perishable people, but in the presence of Christ God who searches the minds and hearts, before the holy altar, with the holy angels and the saints as witnesses, in the presence of this priestly brotherhood, and you promise to live and to die with us. All that happens to be suffered, for the sake of the true faith, either from false brethren or from temptations falling upon us from Satan through wicked men, it is appropriate and right for you to sustain, as you now renounce the world and yourself, and take the sweet yoke of Christ, that you may put to death whatever in you is earthly. When you remember as it is written on the table of your heart, the holy word of the great sage, Ben Sira, which has just been read: My son, if you come forward to serve God prepare yourself for temptations and trials. Cling to Him. Do not leave Him, because you will learn through your way of life (2:1-2). Therefore wait for the Lord your God. Keep His way and He will lift you up to inherit the fertile land, while you apply yourself to humility, patience, gentleness, obedience, kindness, good hope and with and above these, true love which is the perfection of the Law and the Prophets.

Although there are many virtues which, like medicines, fashion the image of the discipleship of Christ, the grace of love reveals more brightly than any other the perfect image of that discipleship, according to the witness of our Lord who said: By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another (Jn 13:35). Thus, indeed, when this foundation is firmly set in you, all the things which may happen to you, you will soon be able to accept, with God. Indeed, the divine Apostle testified to this when he said: Love... endures all things, bears all things. Love never fails (1 Co 13:7-8).

With these keep your word before God in true faith without any infidelity unto the end. Turn away from all false doctrines which fight against Christ, knowing that outside the true faith no one can please God.

On account of their controversial nature, clarified in our days through post Vatican II ecumenical agreements expressed in common declarations of Church leaders on the unity of faith, we have left out, p. 300 from line 11 which deals with the rejection of heresiarchs, beginning with Simon the Magician, Mani, Marcion, Bardesane, Sabellius, Arius, Paul of Samosata, Nestorius, Eutyches, Barsauma the Persian, corrupters of the canons etc. also page 301 which deals with the profession of faith in the Councils of Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus, Chalcedon: 'Receive also with us and like us, the holy Council gathered at Chalcedon which excommunicated the treacherous Dioscoros of Alexandria, Barsauma head of a monastery and those who follow them.' We have resumed the translation from p. 302 line 8.

Accept with us all our fathers, the holy apostles preachers of the truth, and those who came after them and taught the true knowledge: Ignatius the Fiery, the Greek, Julius, Athanasios, Baselios, Gregorios, Ivanios, Kucilos, Jacob of Nisibis, Mar Ephrem the Syrian, the Great Universal Teacher, and Mar Isaac of Antioch, Teacher and Head of a monastery.

With them follow also with us the teachings of our holy father head of the apostles. It is a duty also to listen to, and to obey our father... bishop of Tiruvalla, and also our poor self who stands at the head of this holy monastery.

May God Give you the grace to do good and faithful deeds which are pleasing to the Godhead.

May He give you strength, constancy and patience in all assaults of the Wicked One.

May the Lord remove from you all despondency and all fatal wounds of the Enemy.

May God give you humility with right obedience, which are becoming to Christ's disciples.

May the Lord give you the grace that you may surrender to Him, with confidence and without shame, this habit which you receive, and not put to shame on the day of judgement those who offered you.

May the Lord, Lover of Humankind, forgive and pardon the failings of us all, by His grace and abundant mercy and by the prayers of His blessed Mother Mary and all the saints.

THE MYSTERY INITIATIONS

The Rish Dairo proceeds with this prayer

Lord God Almighty, who brought us from nothing into existence, that we might share in Your goodness, and when we had long been in sin, renewed us again by the manifestation of Your Only Son, who desires not the death of a sinner, as He said, but wants all people to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth, receive this Your servant who has left the world and its deadly storms and sought refuge in You, and has taken upon him the gentle, sweet and light yoke of Your Only Son, and has loved Your commandments. Forgive him all that in which he may have sinned before You, knowingly or unknowingly. Teach him to do Your will. Send down upon him Your grace and blessing. Clothe him in a garment of good deeds, in the helmet of salvation, with the shield of true faith, and gird him with deeds of righteousness. Let him be shod with the gospel of peace, so that he may be able to stand against all the power of the Enemy. Adorn him with the robe of grace and fair conduct, keep his soul without stain. Give him the spirit of perseverance, cheerfulness, obedience and simplicity, and strengthen him in the keeping of Your holy commandments. Turn away from him every temptation, every enticement of the Enemy, and injury from human beings. Bestow on him help without fail, so that he may bring forth fruits of righteousness, and be worthy of the lot of the wise and earnest virgins, when crowns are awarded and the saints are in glory.

Make us all worthy with him to offer the fruits of purity and righteousness, and to find mercy before You who reign over us with Your Only Son and Your Holy Spirit, now and always and for ever.

Co Amen.

1 SEAL *The Rish Dairo marks the forehead of the monk with the sign of the cross, at each invocation.*

RS N... is sealed to be a holy lamb of God.

Dn Barek Mor!

Rs	In the Name of the Father	+	Co	Amen.
	And of the Son	+	Co	Amen.
	And of the Life-giving Holy Spirit	+	Co	Amen.

Then the Rish Dairo prays thus:

May the Lord God, who with His Father is the fashioner of the world, bestow wisdom on you and fill your mind with knowledge, and may your behaviour be such as is pleasing to the Godhead. And by the signing of this seal, may He grant you an imperishable crown with all His saints, for ever.

2 TONSURE *Then he makes this prayer of petition, while the scissors are brought and laid before the altar.*

Our Lord and our God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who are the Eternal Word and Immaterial Offspring of the Invisible Father, who in Your love for humankind were manifested in a human form on earth for the salvation of Your image, and delivered it from the slavery of Satan the wicked enemy, and summoned the heavenly hosts to rejoice over the return of Your sheep, We worship You and we give thanks to You for all Your graces which are given to us, and for the beauty of Your condescension towards our weak race. We beseech You, in Your ineffable love for humankind, visit us with the accustomed kindness of Your bountiful mercies and actuate for us the mystery of salvation by the return of this sheep who broke the fetters of the world and took refuge in You. Grant that he may be numbered among the guests of Your marriage feast, and among those who are called to Your spiritual table, and that he may be mingled with the glorious companies of Your saints. Receive him in Your love for Your human nature.

O Father, who love sons, grant that there may be a common joy over his return. Confer on him a steadfast mind and a soul at all times strong in victory over the demons, and the shameful passions which lead to death. Arm his thoughts with Your truth and control all his impulses by Your wisdom. Make him a dwelling place for Your presence and a pure temple for the habitation of Your glory. Drive from him worldly phantasies and cast out from him all passionate desires. Give him the strength which comes from You, and take away from him the burning impulses of mortal flesh. Make to rest on him on the

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day of battle the sign of the Cross, to give him the victory against all the deceits of the evil spirits. Remove from him all earthly bond. In Your compassion keep from him constant pre-occupation with anxious movements of the mind. Make him Your sheep in the sheepfold of life; guard him from the spiritual wolves which bring destruction. May Your seal protect him, and the Mystery of Your Cross cause to flee from him all inimical powers, that he may be pure and without stain. Like a young bridegroom may he enter Your indestructible marriage chamber, and with the chaste virgins, with lamps shining with the oil of faith, may he be seen in Your presence at the feast which is full of joy and gladness, and we will offer You a new praise and thanksgiving without ceasing, and to God the Father who begot You, and to Your Holy Spirit, now and always and for ever.

Then, he who desires to be tonsured takes the scissors in his hand and gives them to the Rish Dairo, who makes him to say three times, while holding the scissors in his right hand:

I wish to draw near to God.

Be good to me, Lord, my trust,

that I may recount all Your wonders (Ps 73:28).

Then the Rish Dairo prays:

Lord God Almighty, who sent upon earth Your Only Son, who is worshipped by the powers of heaven, and who delivered Your servants from sin, and commanded them to behave like angels on earth by deeds of righteousness, bless this Your servant with all spiritual and heavenly blessings and make him fulfil Your commandments. Elect him for good. Grant him to live in a way which is befitting Your Majesty, and to fulfil his promise, so that he may be constant in diligence and of invariable cheerfulness in Your service, and perfect in faith, so that he may be worthy of heavenly blessings through Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom, with You and the Holy Spirit, belongs glory and honour, now and always and for ever.

Co Amen.

Then he who is to be tonsured extends his arms in the form of a cross and says: Barek Mor !

The Rish Dairo takes his hair successively from front and back and from either side in the form of a cross and says:

N. ... is tonsured as a sign that he leaves behind him with this dead hair of his head all evil habits.

The Deacon says: Barek Mor !

The Rish Dairo while cutting the hair three times in the form of a cross says:

In the name of the Father + Co Amen.

And of the Son + Co Amen.

And of the life-giving Holy Spirit who lives for ever and ever + Co Amen.

The Rish Dairo adds this prayer:

True Master and Teacher of Righteousness, Hope of Your servants and Trust of Your worshippers, Lord Jesus Christ, be to this Your servant who has fled from the snares of this passing world, a master and teacher and guide. Instruct him in the fear of God, that he may be able to bear on his neck the sign of Your glorious Cross, while receiving the mark of Your humility; that he may be to You a true disciple, all the days of his life. Teach him to do Your will. Give him the pledge of Your Holy Spirit. Clothe him in a tunic made of good deeds and embroidered with virtues, that he may offer You praise and thanksgiving, and to Your Father and to Your Holy Spirit, now and always and for ever.

3 STRIPPING *Then two deacons hold a curtain behind him who is clothed in the holy habit and another deacon takes the tunic, and says to the Rish Dairo: Barek Mor !*

The Rish Dairo takes off the old garments from him who has been tonsured, holding them by the collar and says:

May the Lord take off from you the old man which is corrupted by sinful desires.

4 CLOTHING *Then he clothes him in the new habit, saying:*

May the Lord clothe you in the new man, renewed in the image of his Creator, in uprightness and true holiness, for ever.

Co Amen.

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Then putting the girdle around his waist, he says:

May the Lord gird you with uprightness and true faith, and incorruptible strength against all shameful passions, that you may walk in the way of His holy commandments, for ever.

Co Amen.

And while putting on him the head cover, he says:

May the Mighty Power who, out of love, descended from the heavenly heights and received a crown of thorns, an example of affliction, endow you with true goodness and endurance, and place on your head the helmet of salvation, and the crown of joy and the shield of innocence by which all hurtful inimical forces are put to shame, for ever.

Co Amen.

And when he clothes him in his outer garment, that is the monk's cloak, he says:

May the Lord clothe you in the robe of glory, by the power of Holy Spirit, that you may please Him by a virtuous and upright behaviour, all the days of your life, for ever.

Co Amen.

Zoomoro By David the Holy Spirit sang a hymn of praise and salvation in the dwelling of the just.

Lesson from the Prophet Zachariah 3:1-8

Then the Lord showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, with the Adversary standing at his right hand to accuse him. The Lord said to the Adversary, The Lord rebuke you, O Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this man a brand snatched from the fire? Now Joshua was wearing filthy clothes as he stood before the angel; and the angel turned and said to those in attendance on him, Take off his filthy clothes. Then he turned to him and said, See how I have taken away your guilt from you, I will clothe you in fine vestments; and he added, Let a clean turban be put on his head. So they put a clean turban on his head and

clothed him in clean garments, while the angel of the Lord stood by. Then the angel of the Lord gave Joshua this solemn charge: These are the words of the Lord of Hosts: If you will conform to my ways and carry out your duties, you shall administer my house and be in control of my courts, and I grant you the right to come and go amongst these in attendance here. Listen, Joshua the high priest, you and your colleagues seated here before you, all you who are an omen of things to come: I will now bring my servant, the Branch.

5. **HOLY BATH** *Then a deacon places a jug of water and a basin at the north side of the entrance of the sanctuary and says: Barek Mor!*

Then the Rish Dairo says this prayer:

May God who dwells in His worshippers who have faith in Him when they come to receive His Holy Covenant, fulfil in you the Mystery with which you have been sealed, and by this water, wash away from you, all the foulness of sin, and make you worthy indeed, in this habit which you have received, to labour in purity and holiness. May He keep it for you until the day of recompense. And may you live in purity and righteousness all the days of your life, while you give thanks for His salvation, by which He has visited you in truth. And may the pledge of the Holy Spirit be preserved in you.

They make to sit upon a chair him who has been shorn, for the washing of the feet, saying:

Dn Barek Mor!

Then the Rish Dairo pours water over his feet, saying:

May the Life-giving Water of which we never feel satiety, the Holy Spirit, wash away from you the Serpent's venom and all the foulness of sin for ever.

Then the priests and deacons do the same saying this antiphon:

Wash me clean, cleaner yet from my sin.

The sin which I have committed

cannot be cleansed by the power of hyssop,

nor can the waters of the law purify it by their symbols,
but only the sprinkling and the purifying from the font of God
and the riches of His abundant mercies.

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Then they wipe his feet with a towel while the Rish Dairo says

May the River of Peace and Salvation, Christ our God, wash and wipe away from you all evil and bitterness and all defilement of sin for ever.

When they put on the sandal on his left foot the Rish Dairo prays:

May the Lord make you to be shod in preparation of the Gospel of peace, for ever and ever. Amen.

When they put the sandal on the right foot, the Rish Dairo says this prayer:

May the Lord give you strength from on high, that you may tread on snakes and scorpions and all the power of the Enemy for ever and ever. Amen.

INCORPORATION INTO THE COMMUNITY

Then he who has received the holy habit kneels four times: to the east, to the west, to the north and to the south before the brethren saying:

Ca Barek Mor! My brothers, receive me!

They answer him with befitting prayers, saying:

Co May the Lord receive you in His mercy!

And the Rish Dairo makes this prayer:

Lord our Lord, Almighty and Heavenly, who in all generations dwell in the souls of the holy, make this Your servant to be a sign of goodness and unite him with those who revere You. Preserve him undefiled until the end, in his way of life. Perfect the intention of His will. Grant him a course without shame and be to him a helper. Give him courage and steadfastness in virtue and let him not be conquered in the conflict with the Enemy. Sustain him by heavenly labours, divine teachings and the knowledge of You, while You strengthen him to do Your will Grant him mercy and grace. And may praise ascend to You from us all, Father, Son and Holy Spirit for ever and ever.

Then the Rish Dairo, at the north side of the sanctuary, gives him a cross, placing it on his left shoulder and gives him the kiss of peace, saying:

In confirmation of this covenant which you have made and confessed before God and His holy angels and all this priestly brotherhood, in the faith of the bond of true love we give you peace in the Lord.

Then the newly clothed stands at the north side of the sanctuary with the cross on his shoulder, and all the brethren give him the kiss of peace while they sing the following hymn, on the tune: Work for the Lord with joy:

O you all who have bent your necks to put on
the yoke of Christ's commandments, serve Him with joy.
Your minds captive in the delights of this passing age
and in the emptiness of lust
should not regard the toils as a heavy load and a burden.
The yoke of the Lord is pleasant and His burden is light,
on account of the hope of the good things to come,
which will never come to an end. As it is written,
the Lord is good to all those who wait for Him.
Let us therefore wait for Him until the end,
so that we may not lose Him or frustrate Him,
who created us in His goodness, and when we were lost
by the transgression of the commandment,
came to regain us by His victorious blood shed for us.

Then the Rish Dairo offers this prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, Lover of Humankind, full of grace and truth, to You be praise, to You be thanks for all Your blessings and for the grace of Your assistance to our weak and sinful race. Though we are unworthy, You made us worthy of the teaching of Your divine love. And when we had become strangers through our wrong-doing, You made us sons and members of Your household and declared us brothers and sons of the inheritance of Your Heavenly Father. And when by sin we had fallen from heaven to earth, You again, in Your love for Your human nature, with tenderness made us ascend from earth to heaven, carrying us on Your shoulders. And You made us return to our first inheritance and joined us, earthly creatures, with the spiritual angels. And as it seemed good to You, with joy,

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You chose the account of the one sinner who repents and recorded it among the glorious deeds of Your Gospel.

Therefore now we beseech You, O Lord full of goodness, that as is befitting Your Gentle Serenity, You will receive this Your servant, who by our poor hands has drawn near to You and become Your disciple. Give him a token of spiritual life and take away from him the old man and clothe him in the new and spiritual man, who is renewed by deeds of righteousness. Enlighten his face by the forgiveness of his sins and array him in the mantle of shining brightness. Extinguish in him the ardour of the flesh, bind his mind with Your love, kindle in him the inextinguishable fire of Your charity free from passion. Let him live in You a life such as is becoming and let him receive from You the help which does not fail. Perfect him in truth and in the promises of Your Gospel. Grant him the grace of a lasting confession and dispose him to fulfil Your life-giving commands. Fill him with reverence for You. Strengthen him with an armour on the right hand and the left. Gird him with chastity and purity. Grant him to tread on serpents and scorpions and all the power of the Enemy. Keep his life in righteousness and all his senses in modesty and chastity. Let Your Holy Spirit dwell in him, and Your strength strengthen his weakness in the keeping of Your holy and life-giving commands. And so let him behave as befits his holy habit, so that he may be worthy of mercy on the day of Your glorious manifestation, and with the saints who have been pleasing to You, he may enter the marriage-chamber full of joy, and we and he may be worthy to praise You in Your heavenly kingdom without end, and Your Father and Your Holy Spirit, now and at all times and for ever.

Then they pray:

Holy are You, O God.

Holy are You the Strong.

Holy are You the Deathless, who were crucified for us.

Have mercy on us.

Lord, have mercy on us.

Lord, have pity and mercy on us.

Lord, receive our service and our prayers and have mercy on us.

Glory to You, O God. Glory to You, Creator.

Glory to You, Christ the King,
 who have compassion on Your sinful servants, Bless, Lord !
 Our Father in heaven,
 hallowed be Your name,
 Your Kingdom come,
 Your will be done on earth as in heaven.
 Give us today the bread we need.
 Forgive us our sins and offences
 as we forgive those who have offended against us.
 Do not let us enter into temptation
 and deliver us from the Evil One.
 For Yours is the Kingdom,
 the Power and the Glory,
 for ever and ever. Amen.

We believe in one true God, the Father Almighty, Creator
 of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.
 We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, Only Son of God, who
 was born of the Father before all worlds: Light of Light, true
 God of true God, begotten, not made and equal in essence to
 His Father, by whom all things were made. For us humans and
 for our salvation He came down from heaven and was incarnate
 of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and
 became man. He was crucified for us in the days of Pontius
 Pilate and suffered and died and was buried. He rose on the
 third day according to His will and ascended to heaven and
 sits at the right hand of His Father and will come again in His
 great glory to judge the living and the dead. His kingdom has
 no end. We believe in one living Holy Spirit, who is Lord and
 Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and with the Father
 and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the
 Prophets and Apostles, and in one holy, catholic and apostolic
 Church. We confess that there is one baptism for the forgiveness
 of sins. And we look for the resurrection of the dead and the
 new life in the world to come. Amen.

Then the Rish Dairo makes this prayer in conclusion:

Truly, our Lord and our God, we beg and beseech Your
 tender love, keep the promise which Your servant has made to

You without deceit, and let him not turn back in the manner of Lot's wife, but let him live for you alone and fix his gaze on You. And let him stand before You at all times without shame all the days of his life, and be worthy of the heavenly blessings which do not fail for ever and ever, and of the marriage-chamber of incorruptible light, by the grace and mercy of Your Only Son and Your Spirit, holy above all, and good and worshipful and life-giving and equal to You in essence, now and always and for ever.

Another concluding prayer

Strengthen, Lord God, with the strength which comes from You, Your servant who has received the habit of humility that he may be able to quench all the fiery arrows of the Evil One, and that Your Holy Name may be praised because of him, now and always and for ever.

Thus ends the Service of the Clothing of Monks

COMMENTARY

Our purpose is to offer first an analytic commentary, by reflecting on each of the component parts of our Ritual, following the structure given in the table of contents. This could be described as an exercise of narrative theology, as we shall follow the unfolding of our Church Service from the initial Doxology to the last Concluding Prayer. In a second part we will look at our service as a drama, a drama of four actors, which will enable us to acquire a more articulate understanding of it. In a third and concluding part, we will adopt a synthetic approach in order to bring out the nature and the distinctive features of the monastic Charism in the Antiochean tradition.

PART ONE

The Structural Parts

I Doxology and Opening Prayer

The Service begins with the Doxology pronounced by the Rish Dairo. This is a common feature of every prayer service of the Antiochean tradition, which holds that divine praise is the main purpose of the believer's life. This view goes back to St Ephrem who wrote that God gave speech to Adam so that he might offer praise. And he also confided that this was his major personal life concern:

As long as I live, I will praise You, Lord,

lest I be as if I had no existence.

I shall give praise all through my life,

that I may not be as one dead among the living (Nis 50:1). But the Opening Prayer, also a common feature of the celebrations of the Church, has a distinctive place. It consists normally of two parts: the address which usually takes the form of divine praise, and the petition, often related to the address, but meant to reveal the specific meaning of the Service which is celebrated.

Our Opening Prayer does this in a very remarkable manner. The address strikes us by its solemnity, a fourfold proclamation of the holiness of God, a distinctive expression of the liturgy of our Church which, as it has been rightly said, is dominated by the scene of the vision of the prophet Isaiah, when he saw the Lord on a high and lofty throne in the temple of Jerusalem and heard the angels crying holy, holy, holy. Hence the Rish Dairo addresses the prayer:

O Holy One,

and Lover of the Holy Ones,

who take delight in the Holy ones,

God holy above all...

The petition is closely related to the address. Both point to, and reveal the particular mystery which the Church is about to celebrate: the Candidate's partaking of God's holiness in a life of nearness to Him. When the Rish Dairo and the Community are gathered in the church to receive in their midst the Candidate who seeks to join them and who has been tested for this over a considerable period of time, they first turn to God, without whose grace the charism of monkhood cannot be made to fructify. It is first God who is asked to receive him and to draw him to Himself:

Receive this Your servant set apart for You in holiness.

Give Him the grace

in this unblemished way of life, in solitude,

to be made worthy to draw near to Your Godhead...

As we will see, this petition 'to draw near to God' reveals the main purpose of the monastic life. It will recur several times in the prayers of the Rish Dairo as well as of the Candidate. Here this petition proceeds with an indication of how the Candidate is expected to draw near to God: 'By his good works well pleasing to Your Godhead'. And this is further illustrated by the example of a great biblical figure:

Like Samuel who was made worthy

to live in the dwelling of Your holy tabernacle,

in integrity and purity of heart,

for the praise of the Adorable Name of Your Godhead.

And it concludes with a trinitarian invocation:

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for ever.

To be set apart for God in holiness, for an unblemished way of life, in solitude, in order to draw near to the Godhead, by good works, in integrity and purity of heart, for the praise of the Godhead, all these are as many facets of the monastic charism.

II Liturgy of the Word

1 RESPONSORIAL PSALMODY

1. 1 Psalm 51 is probably the psalm most commonly used at the beginning of our Church's prayer services. But here

it takes distinctive significance. It expresses the deep movement of conversion of the candidate. Standing before the Holy One, like the prophet Isaiah, he is filled with a deep sense of his sinfulness, and he expresses this in ardent prayers for forgiveness, accompanied with unbounded confidence in God's mercy, as revealed in Christ's work of salvation:

At Your door, I knock, O God,
Your door is open to penitents.
Open the door of Your mercy, O Lord...

In the waves of sin I have sunk as in the sea,
O Lord, stretch out Your right hand as to Simon.
Have mercy on me...

Let me not be estranged from the service of Your Godhead.
By the blood flowing from Your side, Lord God,
I pray You, draw me from the mire of my sins.
O Lord, You know our nature,
how it is inclined to transgressions and sins.
I have sinned against You.
Forgive me my sin, O God.

The Candidate's responses conclude with a trinitarian doxology pronounced by the Rish Dairo, who adds a short but solemn prayer throwing light on the Candidate's confession of sinfulness. It is meant to prepare him for entering into a covenant with God. And this is done in terms which recall those of the Opening prayer:

May God to whose covenant you have come to adhere
with readiness, in the fervour of love,
make you worthy to offer praise and glory to Him,
by a becoming way of life, in uprightness,
with the labour of good works, orthodox faith,
and in a manner well pleasing to Him, for ever and ever.

1.2. **Psalm 63** has been described as the warmest and most intimate expression of love for God in the entire psalter. But at this moment the love of the Candidate is still the love of a convert deeply aware of his sinfulness and consequently of

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the need he has of God's grace. It is this grace which gives him confidence:

God, help me, for the storms and tempests of the sins I have committed encompass me. Be a harbour to me, I seek conversion. Stretch out Your hand to me as to Peter...

You let the strong fall, but to the weak who call upon You, Your right hand is a help. By your grace draw me who are afflicted and wounded by sin. You are the hope of those who are without hope. I pray You, have compassion on me...

And his conversion is felt not simply as his own psychological experience, but as an integral part of God's Economy of Salvation:

O God, Your love prompted You and You created me from the dust. You clothed me in Your likeness and Your image. In the Paradise of blessedness You gave me power to eat and enjoy. But by my own will I fell from that height. In Your mercy lift me up. Have compassion on me! Have mercy on me!...

Out of jealousy the Evil One enslaved me. He destroyed my freedom and corrupted the purity that was given to me. I was polluted by the corruption of the world and I have become sheer weeds. In the mercy of Your goodness, my Saviour, bring me back to the way of the commandments. And may I see Your compassion! Have mercy on me!

You cured the paralytic, Lord God. In Your mercy You justified the publican. And to the thief who put his trust in You, in Your goodness, You promised the Paradise. Because You are the refuge of penitents. I pray You, O Compassionate One, have pity on me! Have mercy on me!

Our Saviour, who in Your Gospel promised hope to the penitent, in Your mercy have compassion on Your servant who is lost. In Your goodness, answer our requests, O Glorious One, full of mercy.

And the Rish Dairo again pronounces a solemn doxology, concluding with a petition of mercy and compassion on all, indicating by this that the whole assembly shares the dispositions of the Candidate:

Exaltation to Your Godhead

Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

One Godhead confessed in three persons.

In Your goodness, have compassion on us, have mercy on us.

1.3. Psalm 84 is a pilgrim psalm, a song of joy and of praise for the temple of Jerusalem which the psalmist was longing to reach. But in the Service of the Clothing of Monks this becomes the longing of the Candidate for being received in the monastic community. His prayer is now addressed to them:

In the monastery to which I was called and the community which is dear to me, receive with love my nothingness, because I have sought refuge in your prayer.

I was entangled in the snares of the Evil One. The world enslaved me in its desires. Now, since I am seeking your favour, do not let me go sorrowing...

Brotherhood and all members of the monastic order and fathers in whom I have taken refuge, offer prayer to God for me, that He may have mercy on me.

Further, in the Community, he does not only find brothers and fathers, Christ Himself dwells with them, and he turns to Him again in fervent prayer, a prayer evoking both Christ's sacrificial death and His Second Coming:

Christ who sacrificed Yourself on the Cross for the sake of sinners, protect me, my Lord, by Your Cross. I here bow before Your Majesty.

I have given up passing pleasures to put on the likeness of Your passion. On the day of Your coming, give me a portion in the inheritance of Your holy ones.

The Rish Dairo inserts here a prayer invoking further on the Candidate the protection of the Virgin Mary, the apostles and the martyrs. These are the most eminent representatives of the Body of Christ, and we understand by this that the whole

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Church is involved with the Clothing of the Monk. But the Candidate remains in an overwhelming awareness of his sinfulness and of his pressing need of the purification required for the radical discipleship of Christ. He prays to Him, asking to be purified by His body and His blood – the Eucharist which will follow his clothing.

Let my iniquities be made clean by your hyssop. Let my blemishes be wiped off by Your blood. Let the secret movements of my thoughts be sanctified by Your body.

Here, as the Rish Dairo intones Mary's hymn of thanksgiving, the Candidate pursues its recitation. But the Community takes over from him and completes it.

As we just observed, the Candidate remains deeply concerned with the need of purification, and for this he now turns to the Holy Spirit in a bold and fervent prayer, a true epiclesis:

Let the Spirit breathe upon me, who by His descent removes our foulness and renews our old nature.

And the Rish Dairo takes over from him, corroborating his prayer and expanding on it:

By His overshadowing you, may He burn away the luscious growth of sins, and instead pour grace upon you, so that you may be transformed, and give fitting thanks. Truly, we owe a debt of thanks.

Touched by this prayer which comes in support of his own and even enhances it, the Candidate now boldly invites the Community to join with him in offering thanksgiving:

With the joyful sounds of chant ascending to Him who is on high, now let us exalt together in all sincerity with spiritual songs, Him who purifies us and removes our old habits of sin. Truly we owe a debt of thanks.

But it is first the Rish Dairo who takes up the invitation, offering a touching prayer addressed to Mary. As her divine motherhood, in her Son, restored the original radiance of the human nature, may she now obtain from Him to make to shine again His rays upon all. It is for this that we offer thanks:

O Gentle Mary, to make to shine again our nature which was wallowing in the mire of sin, and obscured by the deceitfulness of idols, you revealed it in Your Only Son. Therefore, by the power of your prayers, draw again His radiance upon us to dispel the gloom that darkens us. Truly we owe a debts of thanks.

And here the Community takes over from the Rish Dairo by singing Psalm 113: Praise, O servants of the Lord, praise the Name of the Lord..., in which praise is offered to the Almighty Lord of heaven and earth by His servants who are thus raised to His own height.

The Responsorial Psalmody concludes here with a quqlion recited by the Candidate. It is another deep confession of his sinfulness during which he once more makes an ardent supplication for forgiveness from God, but he seeks also the prayer of the Community. These requests are however permeated with joy, the joy expressed by the recurring halleluias of the quqlion:

O Lord, I ask forgiveness for the sins I have committed...
Halleluia, halleluia.

Lord, full of mercy, be merciful to Your servant...
Halleluia, halleluia.

You all, my brothers and fathers, the community which I love, ask mercy for my weakness for I seek refuge in your prayers.

Halleluia, halleluia.

I was a diligent servant to sin and to evil habits.

Oh! What a shame is kept for me and those like me.
Halleluia, halleluia.

The Rish Dairo interrupts the Candidate's confession of sins with a Doxology responded to by the Community, but the Candidate utters the last words, words of deep repentance with a prayer for forgiveness:

With a broken heart, I make supplication to You, Good One full of mercy. In Your compassion forgive my transgressions for You are He who forgives sinners. Halleluia, halleluia.

2 THE SERVICE OF INCENSE

2.1. The Sedro

The Responsorial Psalmody is now completed and we turn to the Service of Incense which consists of Sedro, Qolo or Hymn and Etro, Prayer of Incense. The Sedro is one of the most distinctive prayers of the Antiochean liturgical tradition. It is the Church's solemn prayer of praise and thanksgiving, concluding with petitions, a very biblical prayer of which a perfect model is found in the Acts of the Apostles, the prayer of the community of Jerusalem to thank God for the release of Peter and John who had been arrested by the Sanhedrin. The prayer was visibly blessed by the Lord for it concluded with a miniature pentecost, as the house where they were assembled rocked, and filled with the Holy Spirit they began to proclaim the word of God fearlessly (124-31).

The Sedro is a climax of the Liturgy of the Word. It is essentially a prayer of the Church as a whole, a prayer commemorating the Divine Dispensation of the Economy of Salvation: creation, fall and redemption, seen here by the Church as the all embracing perspective of the celebration of the Clothing of the Monk which is part of her life. The praise, thanksgiving, glory of the Proemion are addressed to:

The Remitter of debts and Forgiver of sins who washed away all iniquities and cleanses all defilements, who is remote and beyond all thought, the Wisdom and Radiance of His Father, who set out as a Good Shepherd to seek the lost sheep and found them for life everlasting, who emptied Himself for our salvation and became man from a human being, uniting His Godhead with our manhood. Self-existent Son of the Father, He confined Himself in His creation, and became man from the Virgin without changing from being God, the Creator who made heaven by His word, and by the breath of His mouth all the hosts of heaven.

The universal concern of the Church at the Clothing of the Monk is beautifully revealed in the first section of the Sedro proper. She first recalls the Lord's great acts of forgiveness in

salvation history. How the people's idolatry was pardoned thanks to Moses' intercession (Ex 32:11-14), how Miriam was healed of the leprosy inflicted on her on account of her contention with Moses (Nu 12:1-15), how David's murder and adultery were pardoned because of his humble prayer (2 Sam 12), how Rahab the prostitute was saved (Jos 6:17) and also Jonah and the impious king Manasseh (2 Ch. 33:10-13). With these in mind she offers prayers for her own needs, but again relating them to Christ's work of salvation and associating them with the heavenly companies:

Accept now the prayers and supplications of Your servants who, with fear and trembling, are brought into the presence of Your Lordship. Send on them the gift of the Holy Spirit, O Lord our God, who for our salvation were raised on the wood of the cross and thus sanctified the air. You descended into Sheol and joined combat with Death, and raised the human nature sunken in the passions of sins, carrying it on Your shoulders, O Lover of Humankind. For the joy and gladness of this, You invited all the heavenly hosts, O Good Shepherd who came to call sinners, and turned them unto You. In Your gentleness, receive the penitents, protect the just in Your mercy, raise those who have fallen and set firm those who stand. Make to return those who have gone astray, gather those who are dispersed. In Your love for humankind give to everyone that which is good and useful.

Only after offering petitions for the whole human family does the Church turn to the Candidate, asking for him all the graces he needs and she does this in words which recall earlier prayers:

And this Your servant, set apart from the world to draw near to You, make him worthy of Your mercy, of the pardon of sins and of seeing you with unveiled face. Deliver him from snares and stumbling blocks, from temptations to sin, and from all devices of the Adversary and of wicked men. Free him from evil passions and from all impure thoughts which are not pleasing to You. Keep him in purity, in holiness, in chastity, in modesty, and in all which is pleasing to Your will. Save him from being a cause of scandal, or offence, or ruin, or harm, and of

whatever sin to himself or to his fellow beings, to those of outside and those of inside. But strengthen him with Your ineffable grace, You who take pleasure in the life of human beings, that he may become a cause of glory to Your Holy Name.

And the concluding words of the Sedro are again a prayer in favour of the whole Congregation, 'the people who are gathered here', their salvation, that they may offer praise to the Holy Trinity:

Let Your grace extend its wings and protect us... that sharing in this salvation, we may be worthy to offer the praise of victory, to the Multitude of Your Immeasurable Mercies, and to Your Blessed and Blissful Father who has sent You for our salvation, and to Your Holy Spirit, Holy above all, Good and Adorable, Life-giving and Consubstantial to You, now and always and for ever.

2.2. **The Qolo** or Hymn consists of four stanzas. The first two are fittingly sung by the Community. The first one is a prayer to Jesus in the form of a joyous song, asking Him to welcome the Candidate into His fold. It reminds us of the Opening Prayer where the Holy One Himself was asked to receive him.

O Son of God, let the sheep come to Your fold...
Receive him, Lord, in the abundance of Your goodness,
and mark him again with the sign of the Cross.

This may be an allusion to baptism to which the Clothing of Monks is traditionally related, but also to his sealing, the first Mystery initiations of this celebration, which he will receive after the Admonition of the Rish Dairo:

Let him carry Your yoke which is pleasant
and Your burden which is light,
that with the wise and earnest virgins
he may be made worthy of Your bridal chamber.
Halleluia, halleluia.

The parable of the ten maidens alluded to in this stanza speaks of the wise ones who found their way to the marriage feast, but here the Church prays that the Candidate may be introduced in the bridal chamber, which is traditionally understood as the highest fulfilment of union with God, spiritual marriage in Christian mysticism.

In the second stanza the community addresses a still more ardent prayer to Christ, in which she recalls His salvation of our souls through the Cross, and how He makes them beautiful by His teachings which lead them to life eternal. This is followed by a fervent petition in favour of the Candidate:

This soul which is betrothed to Your crucifixion,
give it to do good works and make it worthy
of the bridal chamber. Halleluia, halleluia.

The two other stanzas are prayers of the Candidate. The first of these – the third of the Qolo – addressed to Christ, seeks protection from the Evil One, but concludes with a request to be admitted to the feast which He prepares for His disciples:

Protect me as the apple of Your eye and keep me,
that the Evil One may not harm me.
Let Your graciousness set out to seek me.
Let Your mercy protect me. Let me be a guest
at the banquet prepared for Your beloved.
Halleluia, halleluia.

The last stanza begins with the Candidate's humble request for the prayers of the Community:

Flock of spiritual sheep who have brought me to His fold,
ask mercy for my weakness, for I love your company,

And the Community immediately fulfils his request, offering intercessions for him to Christ:

May our Lord be to you a stronghold,
and by Him may you be saved from all harm.
May our Lord treat you alike with all those who do
His will,
that He may rejoice in you and you in Him,
in the life which does not pass away.

Halleluia, halleluia.

2.3. The Etro is the prayer which concludes the Service of Incense. Offered by the Rish Dairo, it is addressed to Christ, in favour of the Candidate:

O Lord, open the door of Your mercy to
this Your servant
and receive him, for he bowed his neck
to take upon him Your sweet yoke.
Let Your Spirit come and rest on him.
Pardon all his failings.
Count him among Your flock.
Let him be a lamb in Your sheepfold,
that with all the children of the Church and
holy disciples,
he may praise You and Your Father and,
Your Holy Spirit,
now and always and for ever.

3. THE BIBLE LESSONS

If the prayers of the Church actualize the saving acts of God in the assembly which celebrates them, this will be equally true, and even more so, of the Bible lessons. For the Word of God possesses an inherent power.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it (Is 55:10-11).

Expressed in the form of Holy Scripture, the word communicates divine grace and truth. Indeed it has a dynamic quality: "The word itself which I have spoken will judge the unbeliever," (Jn 12:48). It even passes judgement on the movements and secret intentions of the heart in its quest for the rest in God:

Let us strive to enter into that rest lest we fall. The word of God is alive and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing in the division of soul and spirit and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Before Him no creature is hidden. All are open and laid

bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do (Heb 4:11-12).

We will hear from St Peter that we 'Are born anew from the living and abiding Word of God'. This suggests that this word is a seed of divine life in us. And St Paul will exhort us, 'To let the word of God dwell in us in all its richness'.

The Antiochean liturgical tradition is illustrious for the rich biblical fabric of its prayers, but also for the plentiful fare of Bible lessons which it provides for its celebrations. Every Sunday and feast of the year we have four lessons from the Old Testament, chosen respectively from the Pentateuch – Genesis, Exodus and Deuteronomy enjoying a priority – from the Historical and Wisdom Books, and from the Prophets, usually concluding with the Glorious Prophet Isaiah. The New Testament is read on three tiers: first a lesson from the Acts of the Apostles, the Catholic Epistles or the Revelation to John; second Saint Paul, and third the Gospel proclaimed with great solemnity by the main celebrant.

For the Service of the Clothing of Monks it provides six Old Testament lessons and three from the New Testament. Each of these lessons illustrates in its own way the monastic charism, a gift of grace but also a divine call to which the Candidate has to respond, a call which he has to fulfil.

The fathers of the monastic life liked to turn to great figures of the Old Testament as to friends of God and models for them. To a monk who asked Abba Nistheros, a friend of Abba Anthony, what he should do to be saved, the Abba replied:

Are not all actions equal? Scripture says that Abraham was hospitable and God was with him. David was humble and God was with him. Elijah loved interior peace and God was with him. So, do whatever you see your soul desires according to God and guard your heart.

In his life, written by St Athanasius, St Anthony is made to say that the monk must have the spirit of Elijah. To Elijah, Aphrahat, the Sage of Persia, closely associates John the Baptist, whom Jesus in the Gospel will identify with him: 'John the Baptist himself is Elijah whom you expect (Mt 11:14).

3.1. Old Testament

3.1.1. The first Old Testament lesson is from the Book of Genesis, 12:1-9, God's call to Abram. This points to the great renunciation required from the Candidate, here related to country, family and father's house. But this renunciation will turn into a blessing. Abram himself will be a blessing! But he has to launch out into a pilgrim life, in obedience and pure faith, and perseverance in it until his death:

Leave your country and your kinsmen and your father's house for a land which I will show you... I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing... In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed... So Abram went, as the Lord had told him... and set forth to the land of Canaan... There the Lord appeared to him and said, 'To your offspring I will give this land. So he built an altar to the Lord... From there he moved to the hill country.

It is quite remarkable that already St Anthony himself in his First Letter, which was written as an introduction to the monastic life, singles out Abraham as the model of those who hear God's call by the law of love which is implanted in their nature:

The word of God came to them, and they doubted not at all, but followed it readily like Abraham the Patriarch... God appeared to him and said, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And he went, nothing doubting, ready for his calling. He is the pattern of this approach, which still persists in those who follow in his footsteps. Toiling and walking in the fear of God in patience and quiet, they achieve the true manner of life, because their souls are ready to follow the love of God.

3.1.2 The second lesson, from the **Book of Numbers, 6:1-8**, recalls another model, the Nazirite, one who takes a vow of abstinences, that sets him apart for the service of God, a person consecrated, permanently or temporarily:

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the Israelites and say to them: When either men or women make a

special vow, the vow of a nazirite, to separate themselves to the Lord, they shall abstain from wine and strong drinks... All the days of their nazirite vow no razor shall come upon the head... All their days as nazirites – that is those who are consecrated – they are holy to the Lord.

Such a vow is attributed to St Paul in Acts 18:18. The vow of the nazirite is fulfilled in the present daily life of the monk by the unworldliness of his life involving various restraints: the chastity of the body, the purification of the soul, frugality, a vegetarian diet, fasts, renunciation to bodily comforts and luxuries, the giving up altogether or the restriction of furniture, sleeping on the ground or a low bed with a hard board. Rabban Youssif, in the ninth century described the nazirite vow as:

The shield that wards off the arrows of the Evil One... It is through the nazirite vow that the body is made pure by fasting, the soul resplendent, and the spirit raised up to a state beyond splendour.

3.1.3 The lesson from the **Book of Deuteronomy, 30:15–20**, evokes God's intervention in the life of His people, when through His prophet, Moses, He confronted them with the urgency of making a life decision. Though the word is not used, it was a Covenant renewal. These verses are generally considered to be the conclusion of a liturgical address to the community: 'Today, I have set before you, life and death'. 'Today' emphasizes the existential import of the message, the need to make a life decision. They recall the biblical teaching on the two ways, good and evil, but with a special emphasis on the choice to be made. On account of this they are also an exhortation to restore the harmony of their relationship with God. The choice to be made is between good and evil, between life and death:

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and good, death and evil. Choose life so that you and your descendents may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying His voice, holding fast to Him, for in this life consists.

The Clothing of the Monk involves a life long commitment to good, in the love of God, obedience to Him and holding fast to Him.

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3.1.4 The lesson from the **Book of Sirach, 2:1–13**, to which the Rish Dairo will refer explicitly in his Exhortation, is a warning of coming trials and an exhortation to steadfastness and perseverance when their time comes:

My son, if you come forward to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for trials. Be sincere of heart, be steadfast and do not be alarmed when disaster occurs. Cling to Him and do not leave Him. Whatever happens accept it; even if you suffer humiliation be patient. Gold is tested by fire and those who are called are tested in the furnace of humiliation.

3.1.5 The lesson from **Isaiah, 18:1–7**, is an oracle on Ethiopia of which the relevance is not immediately perceived. It must be interpreted analogically. The prophet claims to have a message from Yahweh for the nation which was then proudly ruling over Egypt and he announces a coming devastation of the country. Devastation which will soon affect Ethiopia. The nation mighty and conquering has its meaning, it is part of the divine dispensation which is bound to be fulfilled in due time:

For the Lord sits quietly seeing shoots cut off with pruning hooks, spreading branches hewn away. They shall be left to the birds' prey. But gifts will be brought to the Lord from the nation plundered and uprooted, from a people dishonoured and trodden underfoot, to Mount Zion the place of the name of the Lord.

The Candidate's life may have had its errings and devastations; through them he has now been led to the Lord. His dedication is a gift brought to the Lord. He becomes an offering to the Lord.

3.1.6 The lesson from the **Lamentations of Jeremiah, 3:25–36**, strikes a different note. It reveals the essential role of solitude and silence to make the monastic charism bear fruit. In the Opening Prayer the Rish Dairo described it as an unblemished way of life, in solitude. Solitude and silence are distinctive features of the monastic life. They are required if the monk has to draw near to God. They create a sacred space for the intimate encounter with Him. These verses have a mystical ring. They refer to the silence of the heart which helps the monk to articulate thoughts, feelings and longings to which ordinary

human speech can give no expressions. It is the silence of one who puts his trust in God, who is at rest in Him at the time of suffering. Further, these words anticipate the sayings of the Sermon on the Mount which warn against retaliation, and ask not to resist the evil-doer, not to seek legal action to redress injustice. They even point to the Lord's patience in the most shameful treatment inflicted on Him during His passion:

It is good to wait in silence for the salvation of the Lord.
It is good for one to bear the yoke in youth,
to sit in solitude and silence when it weighs heavy.
When one's head is laid in the dust, there may yet be hope,
to offer one's cheek to the smiter,
and to be filled with insults.

For the Lord will not reject for ever.
Although He brings grief, He will have compassion
out of the abundance of His unshakable love,
for it is not for His own pleasure
that He afflicts or grieves anyone.

When prisoners of the land are crushed under foot,
when human beings are deprived of their rights
in defiance of the Most High,
and in the courts justice is perverted,
does the Lord not see it?

3.2. New Testament

The *zoomoro*, the verse chanted by the community before the New Testament readings, tells us that we shall now listen to the apostles, that is those who shared Jesus' life and were sent by Him to proclaim His good news; those who speak about Him and have recorded His own words for us. And it concludes with a declaration of blessedness: Blessed are those who believe. We are invited to listen to the two princes of the apostles, Peter and Paul.

3.2.1. The first lesson, from **St Peter's First Letter, 1:13-25**, is an exhortation to sanctity through watchfulness, obedience to the truth and sincere love. Read at this stage of the celebration of the Clothing of the Monk, Peter's description of the true believer is remarkably monastic. He reveals here not only the ascetical and sacramental dimensions proper to the monastic

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charism, but also the eschatological orientation of the monk's life. The monk is one who is fully awake, his mind free from encumbrances, sober and self-controlled, who puts all his hope on the gift of grace which will come to him more fully when Jesus Christ is revealed. Through Him who rose from the dead and was raised in glory by His Father, the monk comes to put his trust more and more in God, his faith and hope are all set on Him. Purified by obedience to the truth, he comes to experience a more genuine love of his brothers; he loves more intensely and from the heart. This is indeed a new birth, a birth not of any perishable seed, but from an imperishable one, the living and enduring Word of God. The Word of God actuates in him life divine, here contrasted by Peter in the words of Isaiah, with the weakness and helplessness of the human nature left to itself:

All flesh is like grass.

Its glory like the flower of the field.

The grass withers, and the flower fades,

but the Word of the Lord endures for ever.

322. The second lesson is from **St Paul's Letter to the Colossians, 3:1-17**. It takes us more deeply into the mystery of the rebirth and the life in Christ:

If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above where Christ is. Set your thoughts on things above, not on the things that are on earth because you have died and now the life you have is hidden with Christ in God. But when Christ is revealed, and He is our life, you too will be revealed with Him in glory.

At baptism, union with the glorified Christ, participation in His death and resurrection is instantaneous at the radical, mystical level, but at the practical level of life on earth this union has to be grown into gradually, and carried out in daily life. This is the work to which the Candidate commits himself when he professes to draw near to God. Already dead to the world by the new birth of baptism he has still to put to death day after day the old sinful self which still lives in him, until he enters into the eternal peace of Christ:

You have stripped off the old nature, then put it off and have done with it. You have put on the new nature, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator.

The Rish Dairo will use these very words, when he clothes the Candidate in the monastic habit. But it is from St Paul that we hear how the clothing should affect the monk's life:

Put on, then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, in generosity and humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive each other... The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And may the peace of Christ reign in your hearts, because it is for this that you were called together in one body. Always be thankful. And let the word of God in all its richness dwell in you. Teach each other, advise each other, in all wisdom. With gratitude in your hearts sing psalms and hymns and inspired songs to God. And whatever you say or do, let it be in the name of the Lord Jesus, in thanksgiving to God the Father, through Him.

At this point the gospel stand is taken to the middle of the *gestromo*, while the deacon chants in a loud voice:

In silence and awe and reverence let us listen and hear the proclamation of the life-giving word of God which is read from the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

3.2.3 The Gospel lesson is from **St Luke, 14:25-35** and **15:1-10**. It very aptly takes us back to the demands of the radical discipleship of Christ. After Paul's exalted picture of Christian life, Jesus Himself now shifts the attention from exaltation to the demands of unconditional renunciation of that which is most dear, and of total dedication of life:

Anyone coming to Me without hating (that is in utter detachment from) father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes and even his own life, cannot be My disciple. No one who does not carry his cross while coming after Me, cannot be My disciple.

And there follow the parables of the Tower-builder and the King who would make war. These are an exhortation to self-testing,

by the lesser example of the farmer whose unfinished farm buildings cause him to be ridiculed, and the more important case of the king who, in planning a campaign, underestimated the strength of his enemy and must therefore submit to his terms. The two parables underline the Candidate's need of testing himself in view of his renunciation. The conclusion recapitulates the first verse: 'None of you can be My disciple without giving up all that he owns'. Two verses on the salt sound again as a warning:

Salt is a good thing, but if it loses its taste,
what can make it salty again? It is good for nothing.

Elsewhere Jesus had called his disciples the salt of the earth: salt preserves from corruption and adds taste to the food. The monastic charism is the salt of the Church. Yet, this warning should not be understood as if some were to be excluded from this close discipleship. This is conveyed by a last parable, that of the lost sheep:

There will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner repenting than over ninety nine righteous people who have no need of repentance... there is rejoicing among the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

4 THE INTERCESSIONS

The Intercessions which, in the Antiochean tradition are offered after the proclamation of the Gospel by the deacon facing the congregation, are the solemn prayers of petition of the assembly at the end of the Liturgy of the Word. Each time the Congregation answers: *Kurie eleison*. They are addressed to Christ like the *Sedro*, and like it they also speak of the celebration of the Clothing of Monks as an event of the Economy of Salvation.

4.1 The **petition** of the first intercession is for the restoration of the oneness of the human family with God, the very purpose of Christ's work of redemption:

Christ our God, who are an unsounded depth of goodness,
giver of great gifts to humankind, who when You saw
our guilty race fallen away from Your love, in an abyss

deprived of light and prone to be darkened by carnal desires, again made it worthy to be joined with Your sweet yoke, grant us to mend our separations and to restore our divisions to the one oneness in the likeness of Your Being.

The four following intercessions, all addressed to Christ, are in favour of the Candidate.

4.2 For his continued progress in sanctity:

With You – Christ our God – may he be united in the bond of the Holy Spirit, and progressing in a life of purity, without compromise, be joined with the ranks of the holy ones.

4.3 For strengthening him with the armour of the Holy Spirit for the spiritual warfare:

Strengthen this Your servant enkindled with the fervour of love, who joyfully fulfils Your commandments and comes to carry Your Cross cheerfully; strengthen him with the whole armour of Your Holy Spirit, so that he may quench the flaming arrows of the Evil One and remain unconquered by his hostile actions.

4.4 For perseverance until the end of his life:

Make this Your servant worthy to complete his journey without turning aside, and to persevere in a life pleasing to You.

4.5 For the Lord's everlasting mercies:

Open the door of Your graciousness to this Your servant, bowing before You; cause to flow and direct upon him the affluent streams of Your everlasting mercies; cleanse and purify him from all foulness and sores of sin.

The last two intercessions are 'common':

4.6 For the tranquillity, peace and concord in the Church and in the whole world.

That Christ may remove from this monastery, its place and its inhabitants, all that which is displeasing to Him.

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For the remembrance of the Blessed Virgin Mary Mother of God.

For the remembrance of the Prophets, Apostles, Martyrs, Confessors, the Holy Fathers and Orthodox Doctors.

1.7 The last intercession is for the living hierarchs and all the departed:

For the remembrance of our holy father... pope of Rome and our father... our archbishop, and our father... our bishop, and with them our Rish Dairo from whose hands the habit is given to this brother, and for all the departed.

This last intercession is responded to by a triple kurie eleison of the Congregation.

4.8 And now the Rish Dairo offers a short conclusion, a prayer in favour of the whole assembly, summing up what has been offered, but adding to it an eschatological dimension:

Grant us, Christ our God, to persevere with a pure mind working in Your holy vineyard that with the sacred companies of Your saints, we may go to meet You at Your Second Coming and offer You praise and thanksgiving for ever and ever.

5 THE EXHORTATION OF THE RISH DAIRO

The Exhortation now addressed to the Candidate by the Rish Dairo consists of three parts: a spiritual exhortation, an admonition to keep the orthodox faith, and a series of petitions in his favour. The admonition proper is illustrated first by the names of the unorthodox fathers and followed by those who kept the orthodox faith, as defined at the Councils of Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus and Chalcedon, beginning with Ignatius the Fiery and including among others Athanasius, Basil, Gregory, Ivanios, Cyril, Jacob of Nisibis, Mar Ephrem the Syrian, the universal teacher, Jacob of Serug and Isaac of Antioch, doctor and head of a monastery.

The spiritual exhortation begins with a reference to Lk 9:62: 'No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God'. The Rish Dairo first reminds the

Candidate of the sacredness and also the serious implications of his commitment:

You are offering your vows and promises, not before mortal and perishable men, but in the presence of Christ God who searches the minds and the hearts, before the holy altar, with the witness of the saints and the holy angels, and of this priestly brotherhood and you promise to live and to die with us.

He then recalls the lesson from the Book of Sirach which drew the Candidate's attention to the temptations and trials he would have to meet in the course of his life, and on account of this he stresses the importance of a number of virtues: humility, patience, gentleness, obedience, kindness, good hope, and with and above these, true love which is the perfection of the Law and the Prophets:

Although there are many virtues which, like medicines fashion the image of the discipleship of Christ, the grace of love reveals more brightly than any other the perfect image of that discipleship, according to the witness of our Lord who said. By this you will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another (Jn 13:38). Thus, indeed, if this foundation is firmly set in you, all the things which may happen to you, you will soon be able to accept, with God. Indeed, the Divine Apostle testified to this when he said: Love...endures all things, bears all things. Love never fails (1 Co 13:7-8). With these, keep your word before God in true faith without any infidelity unto the end. Turn away from all false doctrines which fight against Christ, knowing that outside the true faith no one can please God.

The call to accept the orthodox fathers concludes with a recommendation to follow also the teachings of the holy fathers, the pope of Rome and of the local bishop. And the Exhortation concludes with a series of petitions of the Rish Dairo in favour of the Candidate:

May God give you the grace to do good and faithful deeds which are pleasing to the Godhead.

May He give you strength, constancy and patience in all assaults of the Wicked One.

May the Lord remove from you all despondency and all fatal wounds of the Enemy.

May God give you humility with right obedience, which are becoming to Christ's disciples.

May the Lord give you the grace of surrendering to Him, with confidence and without shame, this habit which you receive, and not put to shame on the day of judgement those who offered you.

But the last petition embraces the whole monastic community:

May the Lord, of Humankind, forgive and pardon the failings of all of us, by His grace and abundant mercy, and by the prayers of His blessed Mother Mary and all the saints.

Our Bible lessons, together with the Intercessions and the Exhortation which illustrate them in relation to the actual celebration, are the culmination of the Liturgy of the Word initiated with psalmody. But the Liturgy of the Word itself will come to fulfilment with the Mystery Initiations that follow it. The word of God which is read becomes a word of life as it leads from repentance to participation, from conversion to communion.

III The Mystery Initiations

The Mystery Initiations are introduced by a solemn prayer of the Rish Dairo recalling again God's Divine Dispensation, the great mysteries of creation, the fall and redemption, thus suggesting once more that the celebration of the Clothing of Monks is an event of the Economy of Salvation:

Lord God Almighty,
who brought us from nothing into existence
that we might share in Your goodness,
and when we had long been in sin,
renewed us again by the manifestation of Your Only Son,

who desires not the death of a sinner, as He said,
 but wants everyone to be saved
 and to come to the knowledge of the truth,...

And this is followed by a sequel of petitions in favour of the Candidate, of which the first one reminds us of the Opening prayer of the whole service, as it turns to God Himself, here addressed as the Almighty, asking Him to receive the Candidate:

Receive this Your servant who has left the world
 and its deadly storms and has sought refuge in You,
 and has taken upon him
 the gentle, sweet and light yoke of Your only Son,
 and has loved Your commandments.

This initial and fundamental request is followed by a series of petitions for the Lord's graces, which will sustain the Candidate and help him to bear joyfully the yoke he has taken upon him, graces which even point to an eschatological fulfilment, as when it is asked that he may be made worthy of the lot of the wise and earnest virgins, who went in with the Bridegroom to the marriage feast. The Mystery Initiations themselves are spoken of as visitations, tokens of salvation:

Forgive him all that in which he has sinned before You.
 Teach him to do Your will.
 Send down upon him Your grace and Your blessing.
 Clothe him in a garment of good deeds.
 Let him be shod with the Gospel of peace that he may be
 able to stand against all the forces of the Enemy.

Adorn him with the robe of grace and fair conduct.
 Keep his soul without stain.
 Give him the spirit of perseverance, cheerfulness and simplicity,
 and strengthen him in the keeping of Your holy commandments.

Turn away from him every temptation...

Bestow on him help without fail, so that he may bring forth fruits of righteousness, and be worthy of the lot of

the wise and earnest virgins, when crowns are awarded
and the saints are in glory.

And the last petition is for the participation of the whole
community in these graces:

Make us all worthy with him
to offer the fruits of purity and righteousness,
and to find mercy before You who reign over us
with Your Only Son and Your Holy Spirit,
now and always and for ever.

Each one of the initiations brings its own distinctive grace.

1. SEALING

Here the Rish Dairo seals the Candidate with his thumb
on the forehead, by tracing the sign of the Cross at each in-
vocation of the Divine Name, which is answered by the
Congregation.

N... is sealed to be a holy lamb of God,	
in the name of the Father +	Co Amen.
and of the Son +	Co Amen.
and of the Life-giving Holy Spirit +	Co Amen.

And this is followed by a solemn prayer addressed to:

The Lord God, who with His Father is the fashioner of
the world.

The evocation of God as Fashioner of the world suggests that the
graces attached to the sealing bring about a new creation with
the gifts of wisdom and knowledge and a behaviour such as is
pleasing to the Godhead.

By the Sealing on the forehead, the Candidate is identified
as 'a holy lamb of God'. This marks him out as a close disciple
of Jesus, whom John the Baptist designated as 'The lamb of God
who takes away the sin of the world'. This is one of the most
significant symbols of Christ in John's Gospel and Book of
Revelation. It blends the image of Isaiah's servant of the Lord
who takes all sins on himself as a lamb of sacrifice, with the
Passover Lamb of Exodus 12, ritual symbol of Israel's libration
from slavery.

2. THE TONSURE

The Tonsure is introduced with another solemn prayer of the Rish Dairo in the form of a Sedro addressed to Christ:

Eternal Word and Immaterial Offspring of the Invisible Father who in Your love for humankind were manifested in a human form on earth for the salvation of Your image.

The first request made to Christ explicitly relates the tonsuring of the monk to the Divine Dispensation:

We worship You and we give thanks to You for all Your graces which are given to us, and for the beauty of Your condescension towards our weak race. We beseech You, in your ineffable love for humankind, visit us with the accustomed kindness of Your bountiful mercies and actuate for us the Mystery of Salvation – literally, show us a sign or give us a token of salvation – by the return of this Your servant who broke the fetters of the world and took refuge in You.

The tonsuring of the monk is here spoken of as an event of the Economy of Salvation. God visits His people. The tonsuring is the sign of an encounter of the Lord with the Candidate. Further, by evoking his participation in the marriage feast, it relates it to the wedding feast of the Gospel, the anticipation of the 'last things', the mystery of realized eschatology:

Grant that he may be numbered among the guests of Your marriage feast... and be mingled with the companies of the saints, Receive him in Your love for Your human nature.

In the Sedro proper, Christ is addressed as Father in an affectionate manner, after the father of the prodigal son:

O Father who love sons, grant that there may be a common joy over his return.

And this is followed with prayers for the Candidate, petitions mainly concerned with the spiritual warfare. There are references to the seal of the Cross he has just received, but also to the Divine Indwelling:

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Confer on him a steadfast mind and a soul at all times strong in victory over the demons and the shameful passions which lead to death...

Make him a dwelling place for Your presence and a pure temple for the habitation of Your glory...

Give him the strength which comes from You, and take away from him the burning impulses of mortal flesh.

Make to rest on him, on the days of the battle, the sign of the Cross, to give him victory against all deceits of the evil spirits. Remove from him all earthly bonds.

In Your compassion keep from him constant preoccupation with the anxious movements of the mind.

Make him Your sheep in the sheepfold of life; guard him from the spiritual wolves which bring destruction.

May Your seal protect him, and the Mystery of Your Cross cause to flee from him all inimical powers that he may be pure and without stain.

And it concludes on a joyful note recalling again the eschatological feast:

Like a young bridegroom may he enter Your indestructible marriage chamber, and with the chaste virgins, with lamps shining with the oil of faith, may he be seen in Your presence at the feast which is full of joy and gladness, and we will offer You a new praise and thanksgiving without ceasing, and to God the Father who begot You and to Your Holy Spirit.

This moving prayer now prompts the Candidate to take in his hand the scissors which are lying at his side and to offer them to the Rish Dairo. But, while still holding the scissors in his right hand, he is asked to repeat three times his profession of faith:

I wish to draw near to God.
Be good to me Lord, my trust,
that I may recount all Your wonders.

This is truly a remarkable confession of faith, essentially theocentric. Each of its component parts is related to God.

1) To draw near to God. 2) To put one's trust in Him. 3) To recount all His wonders. It is a climax of the celebration, in the sense that it discloses the fundamental disposition of the Candidate and it can be considered as the heart of the monastic charism. It is a biblical theme like 'seek God'. Both express a turning of the heart to God. Both are familiar expressions of a God-centered life. Yet the 'drawing near' which here is a quotation from Psalm 13 evokes a deeper disposition. In the psalm it is the concluding verse of a crucial meditation on the suffering of the just contrasted with the life enjoyments of the godless. It comes as a ray of light from above in the dark night of the soul. The just possesses something which the wicked can never enjoy, however prosperous he may become. It reveals an experience of intimacy with God, of nearness to Him, which the candidate now professes to make the main concern of his life:

Whom have I in heaven but You?

There is nothing on earth that I desire besides You.

My flesh and my heart may fail,

but God is the strength of my heart, my possession for ever.

I wish to draw near to God.

Be good to me Lord, my trust,

that I may recount all Your wonders.

(73:25-26 and 28)

The prayer of the Rish Dairo which follows the Candidate's confession of faith is on an equally elevated tone. It refers jointly to the remission of sins and the angelic life:

Lord God Almighty who sent Your Only Son who delivered Your servants from sin and commanded them to behave like angels on earth by deeds of righteousness.

And it pursues with a petition in favour of the Candidate:

Grant him to live in a way which is befitting Your Majesty, and to fulfil his promise, so that he may be constant in diligence and invariable in cheerfulness in Your service, and perfect in faith...

The Candidate then extends his arms in the form of a cross, praying for God's blessing: **Barek Mor!**

Meanwhile the Rish Dairo has taken the scissors and he cuts his hair in the form of a cross, from front to back, left to right, saying:

N... is tonsured as a sign that he leaves behind him with this dead hair of his head all evil habits.

The Deacon here interrupts the proclamation of the Rish Dairo, while also drawing the attention of the Congregation by calling solemnly God's blessing: **Barek Mor!**

And the Rish Dairo, while cutting the hair in the form of a cross, says:

In the name of the Father + Co Amen.

And of the Son + Co Amen.

And of the Life-giving Holy Spirit who
lives for ever and ever + Co Amen.

The prayer which concludes the tonsuring of the Candidate is addressed to Christ: 'True Master and Teacher of Righteousness'. Accordingly, it asks Him to be a teacher and guide to lead His disciple in the life to which he commits himself:

Be to this Your servant who has fled from the snares of this passing world, a master, a teacher and guide. Instruct him in the fear of God, that he may be able to bear on his neck the sign of Your glorious Cross while receiving the mark of Your humility; that he may be to You a true disciple all the days of his life. Teach him to do Your will and grant him the pledge of Your Holy Spirit. Clothe him in a tunic made of good deeds and embroidered with virtues, that he may offer You praise and thanksgiving and to Your Father and to Your Holy Spirit.

3. STRIPPING

Now two deacons draw a curtain behind the Candidate, while another takes the tunic and says to the Rish Dairo: **Barek Mor!** The Rish Dairo then takes off the old garments of the Candidate and, while holding them by the collar, he says:

May the Lord take off from you the old man
which is corrupted by sinful desires.

The first three Mystery Initiations: the sealing to be a holy lamb of God, the tonsuring and the stripping, belong to the symbolism of asceticism. They point to the sacrificial character

of the monastic charism, the renunciation which it requires. As the Candidate stands there stripped of his garments, half naked, he is like Christ at His crucifixion. The words of the Rish Dairo here call on Christ's intervention, as the real agent whose grace is required for the ascetic life.

4. CLOTHING

The religious symbolism of the Clothing is much used in the Bible, in both Old and New Testaments. Here the Rish Dairo prays:

May the Lord clothe you in the new man,
renewed in the image of his Creator,
in uprightness and true holiness.

This evokes the condition of our first parents in Paradise; created in the image and likeness of God when, by God's grace, before the fall, they lived in harmony with the divine atmosphere, the divine milieu. Theirs was a garment of grace which they lost at the fall. As shame then arose in the presence of the Divinity, they hid among the trees. They had lost the robe of grace, the sign of their nearness to God and intimacy with Him.

Here on earth the garment reveals a distinctive state of life, kings wear a robe of state. But more significant is the garment of the prophet, which is a sign of both his being set apart from the world and of his nearness to God: 'Elijah wore a garment of hair cloak with a girdle of leather (2 Kgs 1:8). John the Baptist wore a cloak of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist' (Mk 1:6). When Elijah is told by Yahweh to anoint Elisha as his successor, he throws his cloak over him. This gesture which replaced the anointing, has the value of a consecration. And when Elijah is taken up to heaven, he leaves his cloak to Elisha as the sign that he inherits his spirit. Our Lord Himself used the imagery of the wedding garment required from those who are called to share in the happiness of the Kingdom. St Paul in the Letter to the Colossians quoted by the Rish Dairo describes the transformation taking place in the Christian in similar terms:

You have stripped off the old nature with its deeds and have put on the new nature which is constantly renewed

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in the image of its Creator and brought to know God (3:10).

St. Ephrem, in his Commentary on the Diatessaron refers also to the clothing symbolism to illustrate the Economy of Salvation:

When Adam sinned and was stripped of the glory in which he had been clothed, he covered his nakedness with fig leaves. Our Saviour came and underwent suffering in order to heal Adam's wounds and to provide a garment of glory for his nakedness (16:10).

While the Candidate, in his triple confession of faith had already solemnly asserted his will to draw near to God, when he is clothed in the monk's habit by the Rish Dairo he receives the sign of God's grace for this purpose. By the hands of the Rish Dairo it is God who takes away the garment of the old nature and again God who clothes him in the new man, the man renewed in the image of his Creator.

The different pieces of clothing are singular distinctive symbols. The girdle signifies:

Strength against shameful passions in order to walk in the way of the holy commandments.

The head cover has multiple meanings. It stands for:

Humility of uprightness and endurance, the helmet of salvation, the crown of joy and the shield of innocence by which hurtful inimical forces are put to shame.

The clothing in the outer garment is accompanied with this prayer:

May the Lord clothe you in the robe of glory, by the power of His Holy Spirit, that you may please Him by a virtuous and upright behaviour, all the days of your life, for ever.

The ritual clothing concludes with a lesson from the prophet Zechariah which suggests that the charism conferred on the monk has a virtue of mediation for the salvation of God's people. In a vision which takes place some time after the return from the Babylonian exile, the prophet witnesses the

investiture of a high priest, Joshua. The priest, who is the representative of his own people, stands in the heavenly court, accused by Satan before the Lord, dressed in dirty clothes. This signifies that, besides his own guilt, he also bears the guilt of his people:

The Angel said to those in attendance on him, Take off his filthy clothes. Then he turned to him and said, See how I have taken away your guilt from you; I will clothe you in fine vestments. And he added, Let a clean turban be put on his head. So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him in clean garments, while the angel of the Lord stood by.

And turning to Joshua the Angel interprets this scene as a covenant:

These are the words of the Lord of Hosts: If you will conform to My ways and carry out your duties, you shall administer My house and be in control of My courts, and I grant you the right to come and go among these in attendance here. Listen, Joshua the high priest, you and your colleagues seated here before you, all of you are an omen of things to come: I will now bring my servant, the Branch.

We understand from this that the high priest and his colleagues will fulfil the function of angels, bringing the people into the Divine Presence. In this intimacy with God the high priest will be another Moses. He and they are men of good omen, signs of future messianic realities: I will now bring my Servant, the Branch—the Shoot of Is 11:1; Jr 23:5; Ezk 17:22.

5. THE HOLY BATH

The washing of the feet performed at the Clothing of the Monk is not a humble exercise of fraternal service, as when Jesus set an example to His disciples before celebrating the Passover with them. Up to now the whole Service had taken place in the nave of the church, but at this moment the Rish Dairo, with his attendant priests and deacons and the Candidate, withdraws in the sanctuary where a jug of water and a basin have been brought. This suggests a most sacred action. Indeed, the bath is introduced by a solemn prayer of the Rish Dairo:

May God, who dwells in His worshippers who have faith in Him,
when they come to receive His Holy Covenant
fulfil in you the Mystery with which you have been sealed...

We understand from this that the holy bath comes as the seal of the preceding Mystery initiations which introduce the Candidate into a new covenantal relationship with God. It has a role of fulfilment. God is prayed to bring to completion the Mystery with which the Candidate has been sealed. This is an allusion not simply to the first Mystery Initiation, when the Candidate was sealed to be a holy lamb of God, but rather to the whole celebration which is nearing its completion, a completion which points to the day of recompense at the consummation of time.

And how is this covenantal relationship created? For sure by the whole celebration. But now it is sealed by the instrumentality of the prayers and the water identified here with the Holy Spirit. It not only washes away our sins: it raises us to a new life and sustains us to persevere in it so that we may be found worthy on the day of recompense:

By this water may He wash away from you every stain of sin and may this habit which you have received make you worthy to labour in purity and holiness. May He keep it for you until the day of recompense.

The Candidate, on his part, has to respond worthily to God's gifts:

May you live in purity and holiness all the days of your life
He has to offer thanksgiving for God's visitation:

While you give thanks for His salvation by which
He has visited you in truth.

For all this to be ensured, the assistance of the Holy Spirit will be required:

May the pledge of the Holy Spirit be preserved in you. This fundamental meaning of the washing of the feet which prompted us to call it a holy bath, is further confirmed and illustrated by the prayers which accompany the actual washing. While pouring water over the feet of the Candidate the Rish Dairo offers the following prayer:

May the Life-giving Water of which we never feel satiety,
the Holy Spirit,

As in John 7:38-39 the life-giving waters are here explicitly identified with the Holy Spirit who is prayed to:

Wash away from you the Serpent's venom
and all the foulness of sin for ever.

Meanwhile the priests and deacons who are assisting the Rish Dairo sing an inspiring antiphon, as if they were identifying with the Candidate, a joyful song expressing his own disposition:

Wash me clean, cleaner yet from my sin.
The sin which I have committed cannot be cleansed
by the power of hyssop,
nor can the waters of the law purify it by their symbols,
but only the sprinkling and purifying from the font of God
and the riches of His abundant mercies.

And while they wipe the feet with a towel the Rish Dairo turns to Christ with another prayer asking for purification from sin:

May the River of peace and Salvation, Christ our God,
wash and wipe away from you all evil and bitterness
and all defilement of sin for ever.

From this we may safely observe here that the washing of the feet of the Candidate at the Clothing of the Monk is closely related to the Mystery of Baptism. This will come under further consideration in the third part of our commentary, but we can already state here that, as at baptism one is born anew of water and the Spirit to enter the Kingdom of God, and become children of the Father, at the Clothing of the Monk, this new birth is re-actuated for a drawing closer to Him, a life in purity and holiness in response to a distinctive intervention of the Lord, a **visitation**, the communication or pledge of the Holy Spirit for which he has to offer thanksgiving.

The holy bath is an initiation proper to the Antiochean monastic tradition; no other Oriental ritual has it. It is perhaps presumptuous to attribute it to an influence of the monastic rituals of India, where **sannyasa diksha**, the monastic ordination, has the same structure as our Antiochean ritual: a long liturgy of the word from their sacred writings, followed by similar

initiations of which the bath is the climax. After the tonsure, the Candidate is taken to the river, where he submerges himself, casting off his old garment. And when he comes up out of the water naked, he is immediately wrapped in the ochre robe. This reminds us of the early Christian baptism and even of Jesus' baptism by John, His precursor. In the course of the centuries the Church's celebrations have been confined to its building and considerably simplified, not without a loss of symbolism. As in the case of baptism where the bath is reduced to a sprinkling of water on the head of the baby, the holy bath of the monk is reduced to a ceremonial washing of the feet. Yet the fact that this initiation, and this one only, is performed in the sanctuary while for all others the Candidate is made to stand in the nave, below the step of the Liturgy of the Word, points to its sacredness. And this is confirmed by the prayers which accompany its performance. By it the Holy Spirit is conferred on the Candidate in fulfilment of his prayer twice quoted: Let the Spirit breathe on me... a prayer taken over by the Rish Dairo himself.

The prayers offered by the Rish Dairo when his attendants put sandals on the feet of the Candidate suggest a dimension of the monastic charism which has not yet come under consideration:

May the Lord make you to be shod with eagerness
to spread the Gospel of peace for ever and ever.

May the Lord give you strength from on high
that you may tread on snakes and scorpions
and all power of the Enemy for ever and ever.

While eagerness to spread the Gospel of peace in St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (6:15) is part of the Christian armour for the spiritual combat, peace was also the first message which the disciples had been asked to proclaim wherever they were sent on a mission. Further, the power to tread on serpents and scorpions and the whole strength of the Enemy (Lk 10:19) was a special gift of the Lord to the disciples to free them from fear in the fulfilment of their mission.

Church history has recorded remarkable missionary activity among the Syriac monks. How they went northwards to evangelize Armenia, westwards to Ethiopia and brought the faith to Central Asia and reached the eastern shores of China only some

forty years after the arrival of the Benedictine monks sent by Gregory the Great to carry the faith to England.

6. INCORPORATION INTO THE COMMUNITY

The sixth and last Mystery Initiation of the Clothing of the Monk in the Antiochean liturgy, coming after the sealing, the tonsuring, the stripping, the clothing and the holy bath, is the incorporation of the newly clothed monk into the Community. Now, after returning to the nave, at the moment of the solemn reception into the community, after all the prayers and persuasive exhortations, and the Mystery Initiations which actuated them, the Candidate, in a dramatic manner, falls on his knees before the brethren, four times turning successively and symbolically to the four quarters of the earth, east and west, north and south, making his earnest supplication: **Barek Mor! My brothers, receive me!** The community's joint response is as a humble as the Candidate's request, coming also as a last conformation of the God-centredness of the monastic charism: **May the Lord receive you in His mercy!**

But the acceptance of the Candidate's request, the welcome given to him by the Community is celebrated first with a prayer of the Rish Dairo in favour of the Candidate:

Lord our Lord, Almighty and Heavenly, who in all generations
dwell in the souls of the holy, make this your servant
to be a sign of goodness and unite him to those who revere You.

Preserve him undefiled until the end, in his way of life,

Perfect the intention of his will.

Grant him a course without shame and be to him a helper.

Give him courage and steadfastness in virtue

and let him not be conquered in the conflict with the Enemy.

Sustain him by heavenly labours, divine teachings

and the knowledge of You while You strengthen

him to do Your will.

Grant him mercy and grace.

And may praise ascend to You from us all,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit for ever.

And when the prayer is completed the reception into the community is solemnized by a gesture of the Rish Dairo. During

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the Responsorial Psalmody, after a Doxology, which concluded the first psalm, 51, he had welcomed the Candidate who was offering himself to enter into a Covenant with God, while offering a meaningful prayer for him:

May God to whose Holy Covenant you have come to adhere
with readiness, in the fervour of love,
make you worthy to offer praise and glory to Him,
by a becoming way of life, in uprightness,
with the labour of good works,
orthodox faith
and in a manner well-pleasing to Him, now and for ever.

But at the end of the celebration, the prayer turns into action:

Putting on the shoulder of the Candidate a bare wooden Cross, he gives him the kiss of peace accompanied with a formal and solemn declaration of the Candidate's new covenantal relationship, sealed by the reception into the Community:

In confirmation of these covenants which you have made
and have confessed before God and His holy angels,
and all this priestly brotherhood,
in the bond of true love
we give you peace in the Lord.

While the newly clothed monk, stands below the step of the *gestromo*, at the northern side of the nave, all the brethren give him the kiss of peace, while the following hymn is sung:

O you all who have bent your necks
to put on the yoke of Christ's commandments,
serve Him with joy.

Your minds captive in the delights of this passing age
and in the emptiness of lust
should not regard the toils as a heavy load and a burden.

The yoke of the Lord is pleasant and His burden is light,
on account of the hope of the good things to come,
which will never come to an end. As it is written,
the Lord is good to all those who wait for Him.

Let us therefore wait for Him until the end,
so that we may not lose Him or frustrate Him,
who created us in His goodness, and when we were lost
by the transgression of the commandment,
came to regain us by His victorious blood shed for us.

IV. Concluding Hymn and Prayers

The liturgy concludes with another solemn prayer of the Rish Dairo, a prayer of thanksgiving showing the Clothing of the Monk as a manifestation of the love of God and of the reconciliation He offers to humankind which has gone astray, a fruit of Christ's work of salvation. And it recalls the Gospel saying that there will be greater joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent (Lk 15:7):

Lord Jesus Christ, Lover of Humankind full of grace and truth, to You be thanks for all Your blessings and for the grace of Your assistance to our weak and sinful race... when by sin we had fallen from heaven to earth, You again, in Your love for Your human nature, with tenderness made us ascend from earth to heaven, carrying us on Your shoulders, making us return to our first inheritance and joining us, earthly creatures, with the spiritual angels. And as it seemed good to You, with joy, You chose the account of the one sinner who repents, and recorded it among the glorious deeds of Your Gospel...

And then come a series of petitions in favour of the newly clothed monk, recalling the earlier themes, including the eschatological fulfilment:

Receive this Your servant, who by our poor hands has drawn near to You and become Your disciple. Give him a token of spiritual life and take away from him the old man and clothe him in the new and spiritual man... Let Your Holy Spirit dwell in him, and Your strength strengthen his weakness in the keeping of Your holy and life-giving commands. And so, let him behave as befits his holy habit, so that he may be worthy of mercy on the day of Your glorious manifestation, and with the saints who have been pleasing to You, he may enter the marriage-chamber full of joy, and we and he may be worthy to praise You in Your heavenly kingdom without end, and Your Father and Your Holy Spirit, now and at all times for ever.

Then they recite the *Qaumo*: Holy are You, O God..., followed by the Our Father... and the Creed. And the Service ends with two more Concluding Prayers of the Rish Dairo for the perseverance of the newly clothed monk, of which we give here the last:

Confirm, Lord, Your servant
who has received the habit of humility
with the strength which comes from You,
that he may be able to quench the fiery arrows of the Evil One
and that Your Holy Name may be praised because of him,
now and always and for ever.

PART TWO

A Drama of Four Actors

Our patient exercise of narrative theology weaving together the prayers, symbols and actions of the Service of the Clothing of Monks can still be enlightened if we look at it as a drama. This will require the repetition of some quotations for which we ask the reader to bear with us, as we shall restrict them to the most relevant to our purpose. Our drama is not a mystery play, as they used to be performed in medieval Europe, and even today at Oberamergau where the Passion is periodically played. Not also a drama ending with a victimisation, but on the contrary one culminating in the resurrection of one who was dead, as the father of the prodigal son, to whom the Candidate relates himself, spoke: This son of mine was dead, and he is alive again, he was lost and is found. The Clothing of Monks is a Church Service, a mystery or sacrament, which through the mediation of the Church's prayers and initiations involves an encounter with God, spoken of as a divine visitation.

The prayers of the Church show abundantly that our Service is part of a greater drama, a drama of redemption, originating in the account of creation and the fall, and unfolding until it reaches out to the parousia. Its centre is in Christ, but it involves four main partners: God, the Rish Dairo, the Community and the Candidate. Initiated in Paradise, the drama is related to the whole creation: the human race, the nations, and more directly the Church represented by the Bridegroom and the Bride, with the angels and the saints in heaven. A privileged place is given to the Virgin Mary:

Who is worthy of the blessing of all the generations of the world, the holy, glorious, ever Virgin Mother of god. And with her are the prophets and the apostles, the

martyrs, confessors, holy fathers and orthodox doctors of the Church.

But Satan is also there, the Enemy, the Wicked One, the Serpent:

Who by his wicked and bitter jealousy deceived us to fall from the heights of Paradise and who assaults the holy ones inflicting on them fatal wounds.

1 God

1.1. God is unseen, yet He is undoubtedly the **main actor**. He is repeatedly prayed to receive the Candidate. This is done in the most solemn manner in the Opening Prayer offered by the Rish Dairo:

O Holy One and Lover of the holy ones, who take delight in the holy ones, God Holy above all, **receive this Your servant** set apart for You in holiness...

And again in the introductory prayer to the Mystery Initiations:

Lord God Almighty, who brought us from nothing into existence, that we might share in Your goodness, and when we had long been in sin, renewed us again by the manifestation of Your Only Son, who desires not the death of a sinner, as He said, but wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth, **receive this Your servant** who has left the world and its deadly storms and has taken up the gentle yoke of Your Only Son.

In the Etro the petition is addressed to Christ:

Our Lord Jesus Christ, true hope of Your Church... Open, O Lord, the door of Your mercy to this Your servant and **receive him**, for he bowed his neck to take upon him Your sweet yoke.

And in the conclusion of the Incorporation into the Community, another solemn prayer, the petition is made in a very touching manner:

Lord Jesus Christ, Lover of Humankind, full of grace and truth... as it seemed good to You, with joy, You chose the account of the one sinner who repents, and You

recorded it among the glorious deeds of Your Gospel. Therefore now we beseech You, O Lord, full of goodness, that, as is befitting Your Sweet Gentleness, **You will receive this Your servant**, who through our poor hands has drawn near to You and become Your disciple.

Further the Admonition read by the Rish Dairo to the Candidate concludes with a veritable avalanche of requests made to God in his favour and in favour of the Community:

May God give you the grace to do good...

May He give you strength, constancy and patience in all assaults of the Wicked One.

May the Lord remove from you all despondency...

May He give you humility with right obedience.

May the Lord give you the grace that you may surrender to Him with confidence and without shame, the habit which you receive and not put to shame on the day of judgement those who offered you.

May the Lord, Lover of Humankind, forgive and pardon the failings of us all, by His grace and abundant mercy and by the prayer of His blessed Mother Mary and all the saints.

That God is the unseen and yet the main actor of the drama appears still more remarkably when the Rish Dairo confers the Mystery Initiations. Except when he gives the kiss of peace to the Candidate, at the Reception into the Community, he never acts in his own name. All his actions are done in the name of God. In the first two initiations he says: N... is sealed..., N... is tonsured... and he invokes the Holy Trinity: **In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Life-giving Holy Spirit**. When he takes off the old garments, he prays: **'May the Lord take off from you the old man, who is corrupted by sinful desires'**. Similarly with the Clothing: **'May the Lord God clothe you in the robe of glory'**. And at the Holy Bath, he turns successively to God, to the Holy Spirit and to Christ:

May God fulfil in you the Mystery with which you have been sealed... **May the Life-giving Water... the Holy Spirit**, wash away from you the Serpent's venom and all the foulness of sin, for ever... **May the River of Peace and Salvation, Christ our**

God, wash and wipe away from you all evil and bitterness and all defilement of sin for ever.

The same God-centredness is shown by both Candidate and Community. The Candidate when he makes his profession of faith:

I wish to draw near to God, be good to me, Lord,
my trust, that I may recount all Your wonders.

And by the Community who, when asked to receive the Candidate answers in unison: May God receive you!

1.2. God is first and most solemnly addressed as **the Holy One**, holy above all. This points to God's transcendence. In the Bible, holiness is the mysterious nature of the Divine, gloriously manifested to the Prophet Isaiah in his vocational vision in the Temple at Jerusalem. But while the prophet was overwhelmed by a sense of unworthiness and felt that he was lost because he, a sinner living among sinners, had seen the glory of the Most High, here God's transcendence is tempered by the revelation of His love. The Holy One loves the holy ones, takes delight in them and wishes to share His holiness with those who draw near to Him. This is what the Church celebrates in the Clothing of the Monks, the Candidate set apart for God in holiness is called to share, to participate in God's holiness by drawing near to Him.

1.3. God is also addressed as the **Godhead**. This refers to the being of God, 'He who is'. The Godhead belongs or is shared by the three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Trinity is repeatedly praised after each psalm. The Rish Dairo, in some of his prayers, gives glory to them in the most exalted terms:

Glory to Your Being.
Praise to Your Lordship.
Exaltation to Your Godhead,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit, One Being,
One Godhead in three persons,
One Being confessed as One.
Have compassion on us in Your goodness
and have mercy on us.

1.4. Our Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour

However, as the celebration of the clothing of the Monk is a Mystery, that is the Church's actuation of Christ's work of salvation, it is to Him that the prayers are most frequently addressed, often as to the Lord, to God, the Saviour; and first the prayers for mercy and compassion:

Christ, who by Your mercy, for the sake of sinners, underwent the passion in Your flesh, have compassion on me, a sinner, I take refuge in You. Have mercy on me.

As You did pardon the sinful woman who came to You, O God, pardon me all my sins and transgressions. Have mercy on me.

In the mercy of Your grace, my Saviour, turn me to the way of Your commandments and may I see Your compassion. In Your goodness You promised Paradise to the thief who put his trust in You... I pray You, have compassion on me.

In the solemn prayers which commemorate His work of salvation, Christ is addressed in the most elevated terms:

**Eternal Word and Immaterial offspring of the Invisible Father...
True Master and Teacher of Righteousness...**

Remitter of debts and Forgiver of sins who washes away iniquities and cleanses all defilements, who is remote and beyond all human thought, **the Wisdom and Radiance of His Father**, who set out as a Good Shepherd to seek the lost sheep and found them for life everlasting, who emptied Himself for our salvation and became man from a human being, uniting His Godhead with our manhood, **Self-Existent Son of the Father** who confined Himself in His creation and became man from the Virgin without changing from being God, the **Creator** who made heaven by His word and by the breath of His mouth all the hosts of heaven.

But His transcendence is matched by His compassion:

Christ our God who are served by choirs of fire and spirit in a way befitting God, and who in love for humankind came down for the lost sheep, and were personally united

with our body of flesh and dealt with human beings and took on Your shoulders the lost sheep to bring it back and made it enter Your fold...

This emboldens the Church to address to Him her most earnest prayers for herself as well as for the Candidate, as quoted earlier from the Sedro, the Etro, the Great Intercessions, and the Introductory prayer to the Mystery Initiations. The same boldness prompts her to address Christ as the Bridegroom who joins with the soul in mystical espousals, but for a betrothal to His crucifixion, and calls her to the bridal chamber:

Christ, Bridegroom who betrothed the human soul to Yourself,
 saved it by Your blood, freed it by Your cross,
 and made it beautiful by a great number of ordinances,
 and promised it life eternal,
 this soul which is betrothed to Your crucifixion,
 give it to do good works
 and make it worthy of the bridal chamber.

1.5. The Holy Spirit

In the Johannine writings the Holy Spirit is intimately associated with Jesus. He is sent by Him from the Father. He is His witness. When He comes, He will lead the disciples to the whole truth. This relationship to Christ is often recalled in the prayer of the Church. In the Season of the Resurrection the Church addresses Christ as Mystery, a Mystery shared with us through the Holy Spirit:

Praise... to the Mystery who anointed us, the Paschal Mystery, the Mystery of the Lord who died and rose again from the dead to renew us by His Spirit and clothe us with the new manhood, making us a new creation, those who are begotten of God.

The Holy Spirit is spoken of by St Paul as the pledge of our participation in God's life:

It is God who has set His seal upon us, and as the pledge of what is to come has given the Spirit to dwell in our hearts (2 Co 1:22).

Accordingly the Rish Dairo, in a solemn prayer of petitions to Christ in favour of the Candidate, after tonsuring him, says: 'Teach him to do Your will, **grant him the pledge of Your Holy Spirit**'. He had made a similar request in the Etro:

Our Lord Jesus Christ, true hope of Your Church, trust of Your faithful, whose door is open to the penitents and who receive sinners returning to You, open, O Lord, the door of Your mercy to this Your servant and receive him, for he bowed his neck to take on him Your sweet yoke. **Let Your Holy Spirit come and rest on him.** Pardon all his failings... (p. 25)

In the Concluding Prayer of the Celebration, his request will be more explicit, pointing to a permanent and active presence of the Holy Spirit in him:

Let Your Holy Spirit dwell in him, and Your strength strengthen his weakness in the keeping of Your holy and life-giving commands. (p. 44)

Yet the distinctive work of the Holy Spirit in the celebration of the Clothing of the Monk is to purify the Candidate from all defilements in order that he may be renewed and labour in purity and holiness. It was in the last part of the Responsorial Psalmody, even after he had offered thanksgivings with the whole Congregation that the Candidate, with the vehemence of an outburst coming from the depth of his heart, turned to the Holy Spirit:

Let the Spirit breathe upon me, who by His descent
removes our foulness and renews our old nature.

And the Rish Dairo took over the prayer, insisting that the Candidate may not only be purified, but also renewed; and thus offer thanksgivings:

By His overshadowing you, may He burn away the luscious growth of sin and instead pour grace upon you, so that you may be transformed and give fitting thanks.

At the elevation of the Mysteries at the Qurbono, when lifting up the chalice the celebrant offers praise to the three persons distinctly:

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To the Father who fashioned the world in His mercy.
To the Son who redeemed it by His Passion.
And to the Life-giving Holy Spirit, the perfecter and
fulfiller of all that has been and that will be.

It is in the same manner that the Rish Dairo speaks of the Holy Spirit in the introductory prayers of the Holy Bath. The Holy Spirit fulfils:

May God who dwells in His worshippers who have faith
in Him when they come to receive His Holy Covenant,
fulfil in you the Mystery with which you have been
sealed.

And how this happens is revealed in the prayer which the Rish Dairo offers while pouring water over the feet of the Candidate. It is the work of the Holy Spirit through the sacramental power of the water:

May the Life-giving Water of which we never feel
satiety, the Holy Spirit,
wash away from you the Serpent's venom
and all the foulness of sin for ever.

1.6. The Mother of God

Closely associated with God, in the Divine Dispensation, is the Virgin Mary of Nazareth, a city of Galilee, betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David, called to be the Mother of the Saviour. Her participation in Christ's work of salvation is recalled in a beautiful prayer, already quoted, which introduces the thanksgivings of the Candidate and the Community, concluding the Responsorial Psalmody, when her intercession is sought for the restoration of the divine image in the Candidate and the monastic community as quoted above:

O Gentle Mary, to make to shine again our nature
which was wallowing in the mire of sin
and obscured by the deceitfulness of idols,
you revealed it in your Son.
Therefore, by the power of your prayer,
draw again His radiance upon us,
to dispel the gloom that darkens us.

2. The Rish Dairo

The Rish Dairo is the leader of the celebration. While offering the prayers to God, he is the mouthpiece of the Church and of the monastic community of which he is the shepherd:

Christ our God...Accept now the prayers and supplications of Your servants who, with fear and trembling, are brought in the presence of Your Lordship. Send on them the gift of the Holy Spirit, O Lord our Lord, who for our salvation were raised on the wood of the Cross... (p. 23).

In his Exhortation to the Candidate but also in his prayers for him, the Rish Dairo draws a distinguished picture of the monastic charism, as here in the prayer concluding the incorporation into the Community:

Enlighten his face by the forgiveness of his sins and array him in the mantle of shining brightness. Extinguish in him the ardour of the flesh. Bind his mind with Your love. Kindle in him the inextinguishable fire of Your charity free from passion. Let him live in You a life such as is becoming and let him receive from You the help which does not fail. Perfect him in truth and in the promises of Your Gospel. Grant him the grace of a lasting confession and dispose him to fulfil Your lifegiving commands. Fill him with reverence for You. Strengthen him with an armour on the right hand and on the left. Gird him with chastity and purity. Grant him to tread on serpents and scorpions and all the power of the Enemy. Keep his life in righteousness and all his senses in modesty and chastity.

But when he performs the Mystery Initiations, he acts in the name of God. He is His instrument, as he himself acknowledges in a prayer for the Candidate:

Receive this Your servant, who by our poor hands has drawn near to You and become Your disciple. (p. 89)

3 The Community

The Community has led the Candidate's meditation all through the Responsorial Psalmody by chanting appropriate psalms apt to evoke his inner dispositions. On several occasions, he turned to them in prayer, addressing them in affectionate terms: the monastery to which he was called, the community which he loved, the brotherhood of the monastic order, the flock of spiritual sheep who brought him to the Lord's fold and whose company is dear to him. He requested their prayers for his weakness, that the Lord may have mercy on him, but also asked them to receive him as one of them:

In the **monastery** to which I was called
and the **community** which is dear to me,
receive with love my nothingness,
for I seek refuge in your prayer.
Brotherhood and all members of the monastic order,
and fathers in whom I have taken refuge,
offer prayers for me to God that He may have mercy on me.

When he turned to them again to request their prayer in the Hymn of the Service of Incense he addressed them as:

Flock of spiritual sheep who have brought me to His fold,
ask mercy for my weakness, for I love your company.

The Community responded on an elevated tone, pointing to their theocentric understanding of the monastic charism:

May our Lord be to you a stronghold,
and by Him may you be saved from all harm.
May our Lord treat you alike with all those who do His will,
that He may rejoice in you and you in Him,
in the life which does not pass away. (p. 25)

In the Sedro, after praying for the Candidate, the Rish Dairo addresses most fervent prayers for the Community, showing by this how closely they are united with the Candidate, sharing his own dispositions of repentance, conversion and eagerness to be with him in life eternal:

O Lord, have compassion on the people gathered here in
Your Holy Name, while we, with him, are pouring our

hearts in Your presence. O my Lord, let not our sins and wickedness enter into Your holy heart which does not remember wickedness. As human beings we have sinned. As creatures of dust we have committed offences. We have failed like servants, but You, O Lord, pardon as God. Have compassion as the Merciful One. Set free as the Good One. My Lord, do not forsake us for ever. Do not turn away Your face from us. Do not let our heads bow down to the earth on account of the evil we have committed. Let us not come to shame, to weeping, to derision before the choirs of angels and before the people. My Lord, do not fill us with shame everlasting, but give us confidence and make us stand at Your right side.

The Rish Dairo in his solemn prayers associates the Community with the Candidate as in the Sedro, when after making requests for him, he pursues:

Accept now the prayers and supplications of Your servants who, with fear and trembling, are brought into the presence of Your Lordship. Send on them the gift of the Holy Spirit, O Lord our God, who for our salvation were raised on the wood of the Cross.

On formal occasions, however, he speaks of the Community as a priestly brotherhood. By this he points to her ecclesiastical character, her being a Church, Church on her own. These are two solemn occasions. First at the beginning of his Exhortation to the Candidate, before the Mystery Initiations, when he calls his attention to the solemnity of the celebration in which he makes his life commitment:

Brother, behold before whom you are standing! You are offering your vows and promises not before mortal and perishable beings, but in the presence of Christ God, who searches the minds and hearts, before the holy altar, with the holy angels and the saints as witnesses, in the presence of this priestly brotherhood, and you promise to live and to die with us.

The second occasion is the formal reception of the Candidate into the Community. Though God has repeatedly been asked by the Rish Dairo to receive the Candidate, at this moment the

Candidate turns to the Community, praying. My brothers, receive me! The Community responds in all humility: May God receive you in His mercy! Yet the formal declaration comes from the Rish Dairo, here acting as both the representative of God and the executive of the Community:

In confirmation of this covenant which you have made before God and his holy angels and all this priestly brotherhood, in the faith of the bond of true love, we give you peace in the Lord.

Then he gives him the kiss of peace. And while doing this he is followed by the whole community. Faith which enables to endure trials, and love which is the perfection of the Law and the Prophets have been the object of much of the Rish Dairo's exhortation in his eulogy of the monastic virtues.

4. The Candidate

The Candidate comes as the last partner of our drama. This suits well his deep awareness of his nothingness. Yet in a very real sense he is the chief protagonist; he is at the centre of the celebration. The plot of the drama, the turning away from a wasteful, sinful life to closeness to God, originates and unfolds in him. Fashioned by his Creator from the dust of the ground, he was clothed in the image and likeness of God. He was given power to enjoy life in the Paradise of blessedness but, of his own will, he fell from that height to sink in the waves of sin as in the sea. However on hearing from prophets and psalmists that God will turn away His face from our sins and blot out our guilt, he turns to Him, seeking refuge in His mercy. Ultimately he is called to be clothed in a robe of glory.

It is this which prompted us to undertake another reading of our celebration. We hope that our readers will bear with us, as we will single out and concentrate on what concerns the chief protagonist of our drama, in order to come to a better understanding of the monastic charism in the Antiochean tradition.

In the Opening Prayer, the Candidate is offered to God, the Holy One, also addressed as the Godhead. The emphasis is on holiness of life, an unblemished way of life, in solitude, most

congenial to draw near to God. This will remain a dominant theme of the celebration. Yet good works will also be repeatedly referred to:

Receive this Your servant set apart for You in holiness. Give him the grace, in this unblemished way of life, in solitude, to be worthy to draw near to Your Godhead by his good works, well pleasing to You, all the days of his life.

The Liturgy of the Word is a moving evocation and, at times, a dramatic illustration of the great movement of conversion – his turning away from the deceit and untruth of the world to draw near to God – which, prompted by the Lord's grace, has taken place in him. In the first two Responsorial Psalms he pours out his heart crying for God's mercy:

O Merciful Lord, I am drowning! Draw me from the sea of sins and transgressions. In Your mercy, raise me lest I be lost in the abyss of sins. I wait for Your salvation, O Merciful Lord, Lord of Mercies have compassion on me Have mercy on me.

A deep sense of sin is already a step towards the sanctity of God. It opens the door for His eager mercy. And the Candidate is comforted and encouraged by the praiseful prayer which the Rish Dairo offers to God for him:

May God, to whose Holy Covenant you have come to adhere, with readiness, in the fervour of love, make you worthy to offer praise and glory to Him, by a becoming way of life, in uprightness, with the labour of good works, orthodox faith, and in a manner well pleasing to Him, for ever.

In a following psalm, the Community's praise of the dwelling place of God on earth – for the Psalmist the Temple at Jerusalem – prompts the Candidate to identify the dwelling place of God with the Community of which he seeks membership, and he prays to be received among them:

In the monastery to which I was called
and the community which is dear to me,

receive with love my nothingness,
for I seek refuge in your prayer.

The psalmody of the Community encourages him as he hears them chanting joyful praises of their life:

They are happy who dwell in Your house,
for ever singing Your praise.

They are happy, whose strength is in You,
in whose hearts are the roads to Zion.

As they go through the Bitter Valley
they make it a place of springs,
the autumn rain covers it with blessings:
They walk with ever growing strength,
they will see the God of gods in Zion.

Later the Candidate will join them in offering thanks, borrowing Mary's hymn of thanksgiving and expanding on it:

With the joyful sounds of chant ascending to Him who is on high, let us again, together, exalt in all sincerity, with spiritual songs, Him who purifies us and removes our old habits of sin. Truly we owe a debt of thanks. (p. 20)

And the Rish Dairo seeks Mary's intercession for the fulfilment of the mystery of restoration of the divine image in a prayer quoted above: O Gentle Mary... (p. 91).

In the Sedro the Rish Dairo again offers for the Candidate instant prayers to Christ, prayers enshrined in the commemoration of His work of salvation:

Only-begotten of the Father, You pour graces and good gifts; You pardoned the people's foolish ways by the prayers of Moses and saved his sister Miriam from her leprosy; You saved Rahab and pardoned David's guilt because of the humble prayer he offered to You... Accept now our prayers and supplications... And this, Your servant, set apart from the world to draw near to You, make him worthy of Your mercy, of the pardon of sins and of seeing You with unveiled face... Free him from evil passions and from all impure thoughts which are not pleasing

to You. Keep him in purity, in holiness, in chastity, in modesty, and in all which is pleasing to Your will. Save him from being a cause of scandal, or offence, or ruin, or harm and of whatever sin to himself or to his fellow-beings, to those outside and those inside. But strengthen him with Your ineffable grace, You who take pleasure in the life of human beings, that he may become a cause of glory to Your Holy Name.

In the Etro the Rish Dairo pursues his prayers in favour of the Candidate:

Let Your Holy Spirit come and rest on him... Count him among Your flock. Let him be a lamb in Your sheepfold, that with all the children of the Church and holy disciples he may praise You and Your Father and Your Holy Spirit.
(p. 25)

The Bible Lessons remind the Candidate of the biblical roots of the monastic charism and offer him exhortations and models still apt to inspire him; the great renunciation of Abraham to country and family on account of which he was to become a blessing for the nations. Next comes the Nazirite with his vows of abstinence and restraints, followed by Ben Sira's persuasive warning about the need of endurance in trials that are bound to mark the monastic pilgrimage. Isaiah suggests that the monk's life is an offering to God, while Jeremiah's passionate elegies of grief rejoin the exhortation of Ben Sira, but add to them a mystical quality: love of solitude and of silence and quiet even when one is crushed by distress.

In the New Testament readings, the Candidate listens first to St Peter's call to holiness a holiness related to God's holiness. This should bring about a decisive mutation in his life. To tread the path of holiness, he needs to be purified by obedience to the truth. This will lead him to brotherly love. By this he will be born anew, as from an imperishable seed, the living and enduring Word of God. The Word of God is the seed of a divine rebirth, as it gives him the power to act according to the will of God.

St Paul expands on this theme in his letter to the Colossians: He who is raised with Christ must seek the things above. Raised to life in Christ and hiding his life in Him, he will be manifested with Him in glory. Such a high call requires

necessarily genuine asceticism, a putting to death of all that which belongs to the earth, the old nature with its deeds, in order to put on the new nature, renewed in the image of its Creator. The Apostle's exhortation echoes the Opening Prayer of our Service, and expounds it, while directing it to the whole community:

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other. Just as the Lord has forgiven You, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, to bind all together and complete the whole. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts; to this peace you were called as members of a single body. And be filled with gratitude. Let the word of Christ dwell in you in all its richness. Instruct and admonish each other in all wisdom. And with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to God. Whatever you are doing, whether you speak or act, do everything in the name of Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

In the Gospel lesson from the evangelist Luke, Jesus Himself impresses on the Candidate that the new life described by Peter, and more so still the life in union with the glorified Christ revealed by Paul, require utter detachment from all that one holds most dear: father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and especially one's own life:

No one who does not carry his cross when following Me
can be My disciple.

The discipleship of Jesus demands total dedication, a very close following of Jesus, even in his sufferings and death. These unconditional demands are however tempered by two parables pointing to the need of discernment, of careful, conscious acceptance of the great task to which one is called.

After a warning against the loss of initial enthusiasm in life – described as salt which loses its saltiness and becomes good for nothing – in response to scribes who blamed Him for allowing Himself to be in the company of sinners, Jesus answers

with the parable of the Good Shepherd who leaves the whole flock in the open to go in search of one lost sheep. And when it has been found and brought back:

He calls his friends and neighbours together and says to them,
Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.

And Jesus draws Himself a striking conclusion of the parable to which the Rish Dairo will allude later in his prayer:

In the same way, I tell you, there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety nine righteous people who do not need to repent.

These words will touch the heart of the Candidate. They are apt to assuage the qualms of conscience which might still trouble him after all his fervent prayers.

The Diaconal Intercessions which follow the proclamation of the Gospel lesson suggest once more that the Church's celebration of the Clothing of the Monk is something more than a prayer service to mark his entering into a new way of life. The petitions explicitly offered for the Candidate are preceded by a solemn intercession recalling Christ's work of salvation, His incarnation and its universal purpose, the healing of the divisions which mar the unity of the human family:

Grant us to mend our separations and to restore our divisions
to the oneness in the likeness of Your Being.

And the last intercessions are for tranquillity, peace and concord in the world, in the Church and among the people; for the remembrance of the saints, and of the living holy fathers. It is in this universal perspective that four petitions distinctly in favour of the Candidate are made. And this again after recalling Christ's work of salvation, His incarnation, when:

In love for humankind You came down for the lost sheep, and were personally united with our body of flesh, and dealt with men and took on Your shoulders the lost sheep to bring it back and make it enter Your fold.

The petitions in favour of the Candidate are:

For his earnestness in his holy life; for his endurance in the unseen warfare, 'that he may remain unconquered by the hostile actions of the Evil One'; for his perseverance until the end in a life well pleasing to God; and above all for the Lord's everlasting mercies.

It is the Rish Dairo who concludes them with a prayer addressed to Christ. It is a request in favour of the assembled monastic congregation, its perseverance in labouring in the Lord's vineyard, that they may be joined with the saints, so that with them, they may meet Him at His second coming.

The Exhortation of the Rish Dairo to the Candidate has been expounded in the first part of this commentary. It first directs the attention of the Candidate to the solemnity of his initiation, and on this occasion, though in passing, the Rish Dairo speaks of his **vows and promises**. He even concludes this introduction with a stern assertion: 'You promise to live and die with us', which might be interpreted as the equivalent of the Benedictine vow of stability.

In this Exhortation a considerable place is given to the orthodoxy of faith with reference to the first four Ecumenical Councils. It concludes with the names of the orthodox fathers from Ignatius the Fiery to Ephrem the Syrian and Isaac of Antioch. But the spiritual section reminds the Candidate of the need of the Gospel virtues of humility, patience, gentleness, obedience, kindness, good hope, concluding with a vibrant eulogy of love, which 'reveals more brightly than any other the image of the discipleship of Christ.'

The Candidate has taken an active part in the Liturgy of the Word, especially in the Responsorial Psalmody. The prayers that followed: the Service of Incense, the Bible lessons, the Intercessions and the Exhortation of the Rish Dairo, illustrated the great movement of conversion – his turning away from a world of evil to draw near to God – that marked his life. But with the mystery initiations his participation in the celebration takes a new turn. We hear him only twice. First when he makes his profession of faith before being tonsured, and last when he prays to be received in the Community. With the Mystery Initiations he becomes a receiver. The symbolic actions and the prayers which accompany them confer on him the monastic charism. In this light we can rightly speak of the making of the monk, his ordination or consecration. This leads us to the last part of our commentary, the nature of the monastic charism.

PART THREE

The Nature and Characteristic Features of the Monastic Charism

We often hear from the Church in her prayer that she feels inadequate to offer the right praises to her Lord: Our mouths are too small to praise You, our Lord. This saying seems to apply also to the monastic charism. It eludes any academic definition. The encounter of world religions which has taken place in the second half of this century has led scholars as well as monks who entered into interreligious dialogue to realize that monkhood was not a creation of third or fourth century Christian Egypt, but truly a world phenomenon.

1 A Charism Inherent in the Human Nature

Our Candidate confirms this view when he relates his own call to the account of creation, of the fall and the hope of redemption:

O God, Your love prompted You
and You created me from the dust.
You clothed me in Your likeness and Your image
in the Paradise of blessedness.

You gave me power to eat and enjoy.
But by my own will I fell from that height.

In Your mercy lift me up. Have compassion, have pity on me.

His longing for being raised from his fall is the longing of humankind. It expresses the human soul's unquenchable thirst for a higher life. He realizes the radical insufficiency of the human condition and pleads for the restoration of the divine image in him:

By his wicked and bitter jealousy the Enemy deceived me
to fall from the height of Paradise.

Since I listened to him, in justice I was found guilty.
Lord, have compassion on Your image enslaved by the Evil One.
Make me return to Your fold. Turn to me. Have mercy on me.

This suggests that the monastic call is inherent in the human nature. The image, the Fathers say, is indestructible. It is the imperishable seed of 1 Peter 1:23.

Now that you have purified your souls by obedience to the truth
so that you may have genuine mutual love,
love one another deeply from the heart.

You have been born anew,
not of perishable but of imperishable seed,
through the living and enduring Word of God.

And God's seed of 1 John 3:9

Those who have been born of God do not sin
because God's seed abides in them.

They cannot sin because they have been born of God.

This seed of life divine often remains buried in the heart of human beings, but, when one turns to God to seek Him and to draw near to Him, it germinates and blossoms and bears fruit in the monastic charism.

2 A Holy Covenant

What does the Service of the Clothing of Monks further reveal about the object of the Church's celebration? In a prayer to God, before tonsuring the Candidate, the Rish Dairo asks 'that he may fulfil his promises'. Promises and vows are also mentioned in the Rish Dairo's Exhortation to him. Yet these are little more than passing allusions, they refer rather to his inner dispositions. We do not find any explicit formula of vows or promises. The nearest to this would be the profession of faith repeated three times by the Candidate when he offers himself to be tonsured. If there are no definite vows how then does he become a monk?

Without dwelling on the implicit allusions to a covenant, as in the lessons from Deuteronomy and of the Prophet Zechariah

in conclusion of the Clothing, we note that on several occasions, solemn occasions, the Rish Dairo addressing the Candidate speaks of a covenant. Covenant is a distinctive biblical feature, an event which is at the heart of God's Economy of Salvation, in both the Old and the New Testaments. In contrast to a profession of vows which belongs to the moral order, it points to God's initiative in taking people as partners of His work of salvation. The reality of the Sinaitic Covenant was that Israel had been chosen by God. By the terms of the Covenant of Sinai, out of all the peoples of the earth, they became Yahweh's peculiar possession, "a kingdom of priests, a holy nation". By being taken as partners of God's Covenant they entered into a distinctive relationship with Him, a relationship implying care from God's part and obligations from theirs.

At the Last supper, when Jesus instituted the Eucharist, He solemnly spoke of it as 'the New Covenant in His blood'; no more as the Sinaitic Covenant sealed by the blood of the animal victim. However, as the blood of the Old Covenant united the partners in a distinctive relationship with Yahweh, now the blood of Jesus is the bond which unites the New Covenant parties: God the Father and the disciples of His Son Jesus, those who believe in Him, as sent by the Father to save the world by drawing everyone to Himself.

In the earliest Syriac tradition, covenant was thought to be the most suited expression for the consecrated life. Aphrahat, the Persian Sage, elder contemporary of St Ephrem, in his twenty three Expositions on Christian life, sets one apart for the **covenanters**, as he called them. It is remarkable that this expression has been preserved to this day to designate the monastic charism, as shown in the Church's Celebration of the Clothing of Monks, a charism conferred as an order, still required today for the priest before the bishop's ordination. This implies that the exercise of the episcopal ministry should bear the marks of the monastic charism.

The Candidate does not come forward with promises and vows. He prays as in the Responsorial Psalmody of the first psalm to **be drawn** from the mire of his sins:

By the blood flowing from Your side, Lord God,
I pray You, draw me from the mire of my sins.

Have mercy on me.

And in conclusion of this psalm, the most remarkable expression of the repentance that makes a true conversion, conversion to the Lord and His reign in this world, ultimately a new creation, the Rish Dairo, after pronouncing the Doxology, adds this prayer:

May God to whose Holy Covenant you have come to adhere with readiness, in the fervour of love, make you worthy to offer praise and glory to Him, by a becoming way of life, in uprightness, with the labour of good works, orthodox faith and in a manner well pleasing to Him, now and for ever.

Further, at a most decisive moment of the celebration, the conclusion of the Mystery Initiations, the incorporation of the Candidate into the Community, the Rish Dairo while putting a wooden cross on the shoulder of the newly clothed monk, and speaking in the name of the Community declares solemnly:

In confirmation of this Covenant which you have made and confessed before God and His holy angels and all this priestly brotherhood, in the faith and bond of true love we give you peace in the Lord.

3 A Holy Mystery

3.1. Mystery and Sacrament

Mystery, in singular or in plural form, is a word much used in the prayer of the Church of the Antiochian tradition. It does not refer to something which is beyond human reason, hidden or inexplicable, but rather to something which is revealed, but a revelation of things divine, a revelation perceived by faith. The equivalent of the Greek *mysterion*, it is the translation of the Syriac *rozo*, from the Persian root *roz*, meaning secret, especially the king's secrets, and adopted by the Aramaic speaking Churches for their biblical and sacramental theology. In its passive form the verb means **to be mystically shown forth**. The things divine are divine manifestations or communications, in prefiguration or in reality: 'Divine Mysteries were mystically

imparted to the prophets'. When in reality, mystery obtains its fullest meaning in the Incarnation of the Word of God and in His Passover shared with His disciples in the Holy Eucharist. Jesus is the Mystery. He is venerated as the **Lord of the Mysteries**. This reveals that He is both the source and the ultimate meaning of all the Mysteries. The various meanings of **mystery** are beautifully revealed in the Sedro of the Evening Prayer of the Thursday in the Week of the Passion:

Praise to the **Mystery Hidden and Ineffable**, who was manifested in the flesh, who was proclaimed and believed on in the world, and accepted by the nations. Him let us, and all those who partake in the **Mystery of faith**, thank and adore and praise, at this time of evening...

We praise You, **Lord of the Mysteries**, Christ our Saviour, who were spoken of in **Mysteries by the prophets**. Abraham desired to see Your day and saw it and rejoiced, when on the summit of the mountain you revealed Yourself to him, a glorious manifestation, in the ram which was offered in sacrifice instead of Isaac and delivered him from the knife. You also manifested Yourself beautifully to Moses in the **Mystery of the lamb offered in the evening as a ransom for the firstborn of Israel**. It is You, the lamb of God, who on Your Cross bore the sin of the world. After eating with Your disciples the lamb prescribed by the law for the celebration of the prefigurative passover, You made them understand that the prefiguration was now to be fulfilled, and the foreshadowing was to yield to the light, and the truth be manifested. **I have a Mystery. I have a Mystery, I and the children of My household, a New Mystery which is revealed to them**. And taking the bread in Your holy hands and having blessed and broken it, You gave it to Your disciples, **the partakers of Your Mystery**, saying: This is My body which is broken for many and is given for the sins of the world, And You mixed the cup, from wine and water, and gave it to them to drink, saying: This is the cup of **the New Covenant** My blood. Take and drink of it all of you. Do not doubt that I sacrifice Myself and consecrate Myself for you. From this time the old order has passed away and all things have become new. Do this in memory of Me, **O the wonderful Mystery, living and life-giving! O the**

Lamb who takes away the sin of the world, and by whom we are saved! O the Great Passover that rejoices the nations by His death! O the Victim that is offered! **How great is this Mystery for those who understand**, an astounding story for those who experience it! The Church receives this revelation. She who is the gathering of the nations **receives this Mystery with faith**, and treasures it, and upholds it before the world. **In this Mystery she eats the living and undivided body**, and drinks with love the life-giving cup, yet she restrains from prying into it.

Lord, under the protection of Your Cross, may Your Church be guarded against the envy of the Evil One. May she be enriched with **the understanding of Your Mysteries**, like John who was reclining on Your breast at the supper, that in Your Heavenly Kingdom she may exult and rejoice exceedingly, and offer praise and thanksgiving to You and to Your Father and to Your Holy Spirit, for ever.

Mysteries in the Oriental Churches designate the sacraments of the Roman tradition identified at the Council of Trent as seven: Baptism, Chrismation, Eucharist, Confession, Matrimony, Ordination and Holy Unction. They are accepted as such by the Orthodox Churches. In the Roman tradition they are clearly distinguished from the sacramentals. These refer to rituals and blessings instituted by the Church, even consecrations of persons as the consecration of virgins and the profession of the religious life. In the Oriental Churches and especially in the Antiochean tradition, the word mystery – as shown in the Sedro quoted above – has preserved several meanings, including the Roman sacramentals. Yet it seems that the Clothing of Monks should be considered as an ordination, as it is to be received by the priests before their episcopal ordination.

3.2. Mystery and Covenant

Let us first note the relation of mystery to covenant. In her prayer quoted above, the Church makes Jesus Himself to declare that He has a Mystery, a New Mystery, and this Mystery is revealed in the New Covenant, the sharing of His body to be eaten and His blood to be drunk by His disciples. While offering them He declares emphatically:

This is the cup of the New Covenant in My blood. Take and drink of it all of you, Do not doubt that I **sacrifice** Myself and consecrate Myself for you. From this time the old order has passed away and all things have become new. Do this in memory of Me.

And the Church exclaims:

O the wonderful Mystery, living and life-giving! O the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world and by whom we are saved.

The Sinaitic Covenant was sealed by Moses when he sprinkled on the people the blood of an animal offered in sacrifice. After this he and his companions went up the mountain where '**they saw God**' and ate and drank. The New Covenant was sealed by the blood of Christ who offered and consecrated Himself in a sacrifice to be actuated in time for the life of the Church in the Eucharistic meal.

As at the celebration of the Eucharist by the Church, the New Covenant is actuated by making us share in the life of the Risen Christ, at the Clothing of the Monk – the celebration of the prayers and initiations – the Mystery actuates a covenantal relationship between the Lord and the monk. It is in this light that we must understand the repeated references to a holy covenant in the celebration of the Clothing of the Monk.

The distinctive relationship of the monastic covenant to the Mystery celebrated with prayers and initiations is explicitly revealed in the Rish Dairo's prayer introducing the Holy Bath:

May God who dwells in His worshippers who have faith in Him, when they come to receive His Holy Covenant, fulfil in you the Mystery with which you have been sealed...

The Candidate here is said to have come to **receive God's Holy Covenant** by which he enters into a new relationship with Him. And God is prayed to fulfil the **Mystery** with which the Candidate has been sealed:

A washing away of the foulness of sin in order to be worthy to labour in purity and holiness.

The visible instrument through which this takes place is the water, while the agent, the Invisible Agent, is the Holy Spirit as revealed in the prayer offered by the Rish Dairo while pouring the water on the feet:

May the Life-giving Water of which we never feel satiety, the Holy Spirit, wash away from you the Serpent's venom.

3.3. A Distinctive Actuation of the Mystery of Salvation

In biblical usage, the word visitation, when referring to God, means a divine manifestation, a divine intervention, either of blessing, of judgement or punishment. In our ritual it refers to a blessing, a sign or manifestation of salvation as in Luke 1:68, "Blessed be the God of Israel! For he has visited and redeemed His people".

It is in this sense that the Rish Dairo, in a prayer addressed to Christ before tonsuring the Candidate – a prayer already quoted in the first part of our commentary but worth quoting again, at least partly – asked of a visitation:

In Your ineffable love for humankind, visit us with the accustomed kindness of Your bountiful mercies, and actuate for us the mystery of Salvation by the return of this sheep who broke the fetters of the world and took refuge in You.

Similarly in the Etro, also addressed to Christ, he had asked: 'Let Your Holy Spirit come and rest on him'. And again after tonsuring the Candidate he prayed, 'Grant him the pledge of the Holy Spirit'.

But in the prayer introducing the Holy Bath these petitions are spoken of as being granted. After recalling that God dwells in His worshippers who have faith in Him, and praying that the Mystery with which the Candidate has been sealed may now be fulfilled, the Rish Dairo turns to the Candidate, exhorting him:

May you live in purity and righteousness all the days of your life while giving thanks for His salvation by which He has truly visited you. And may the pledge of the Holy Spirit be Preserved in you.

The Candidate is now exhorted to give thanks for the visitation which he very truly received, and the prayer concludes with a petition that the pledge of the Holy Spirit which he received may be preserved in him.

3.4. Monastic Charism and Baptism

To the people of Jerusalem who had been deeply moved by Peter's pentecostal address and asked what they should do, the chief of the apostles answered:

Repent and be baptised everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

At Baptism the mystery of salvation is actuated by washing away the sins of the baptised and regenerating him to become child of God by the gift of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, at the celebration of the Clothing of the Monk all the foulness of the Candidate's sins is washed away and through the gift of the Holy Spirit he is introduced into a new covenantal relationship with God.

The relationship of the Clothing of the Monk with Baptism was perceived very early by the monastic fathers. A saying of the Desert Fathers of Egypt has recorded this:

There was a great monk among the seers. He testified, saying: The power which I have seen coming down during baptism I have also seen on the garb of the monk when he received the spiritual habit.

Some seven hundred years later St. Bernard of Clairvaux will draw a more articulate parallel between the monastic profession and baptism:

[The monastic profession] restores the divine image in the human soul and makes us Christlike, much as baptism does. It is also another baptism in that we put to death the earthly side of our nature so that we may be more and more clothed with Christ, being thus buried in the likeness of his death. Just as in baptism we are delivered from the power of darkness and carried over into the kingdom of light, so likewise in the second regeneration

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of this holy profession we are refashioned in the light of virtue, being delivered not now from the unique darkness of original sin, but from many actual sins, according to that cry of the Apostle, "The night is far advanced and the day is at hand".

For us, this relationship is abundantly illustrated by the similarity of the Mystery Initiations of the two celebrations. As the neophyte's threefold sealing with the sign of the Cross, while the Holy Trinity is invoked, associates him with Christ for a participation in His divine sonship, by a similar threefold sealing the Candidate, marked out as a holy lamb of God, is further associated with Christ's redeeming sacrifice.

The spreading out of the hands while making the confession of life dedication of the Candidate and the confession of faith of the neophyte show their readiness, their determination and full surrender to the Lord.

The stripping of the Candidate and the divesture of the neophyte, with the removal of his ornaments, show that both lay aside the 'old nature', and their former manner of life.

Both rituals include a clothing, but the meaning attached to it differs considerably. The white robe of the newly baptized shows that he has come out of the darkness of ignorance and has become white and shining through the knowledge of God which he has received at baptism. The vesture of the monk is more elaborate. While clothing him in the tunic the Rish Dairo prays that the Lord may clothe him in the New Man renewed in the image of his Creator.

While the girdle is put around his waist, the Lord is asked to gird him with uprightness and true faith and incorruptible strength against all shameful passions, and that he may walk in the way of His holy commandments.

The headgear is related to Christ's crown of thorns. By evoking His humiliation, it reminds the monk of the need of humility, uprightness and endurance. It thus serves as a helmet of salvation, and ultimately as a crown of joy, a shield of protection against all wrongdoing, while putting to shame all inimical forces.

While the Rish Dairo clothes him in his outer garment, that is the monk's cloak, his prayer is that **the Lord may clothe him in the robe of glory by the power of the Holy Spirit.**

While the dissimilarities point to a higher pursuit of the monk, his clothing retains a fundamental relationship with baptism. His sealing, tonsuring, clothing and holy bath, like the consignations of the neophyte, his immersion and his clothing in the white robe, confer on both of them the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of divine adoption.

3.5. Monastic Charism and Eucharist

When we compare the Mystery Initiations of the Clothing of Monks with the ritual of Baptism we are rightly led to relate it to this sacrament. This is an understanding of the consecrated life which goes back to the origins of Christian monasticism, as attested by the Sayings of the Desert Fathers. The Second Vatican Council has authenticated this view for our times in the Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life where it says:

By their profession of the evangelical counsels, the religious have answered a divine call to live for God alone, not only by dying to sin (Rm 6:11) but also by renouncing the world. They have handed over their entire lives to God's service in an act of special consecration **which is deeply rooted in their baptismal consecration** and which provides an ample manifestation of it.

Yet, when we consider attentively the prayers of the Liturgy of the Word and those which accompany the Mystery Initiations, we realize that it is also closely related to the Eucharist. Indeed on three significant and solemn occasions the Rish Dairo speaks of it as a Holy Covenant. First in his doxology concluding the responsorial psalmody of the first psalm:

May God, to whose **Holy Covenant** you have come to adhere
with readiness, in the fervour of love,
make you worthy to offer praise and glory to Him,
by a becoming way of life, in uprightness,
with the labour of good works, orthodox faith,
and in a manner well pleasing to Him, now and for ever.

Second, in the Opening Prayer of the Holy Bath which comes as the fulfilment of the Church's celebration:

May God, who dwells in His worshippers who have faith in Him
when they come to receive His Holy Covenant,
fulfil in you the Mystery with which you have been sealed.

And thirdly, as already observed earlier in the Commentary, these prayers are fulfilled in action, at the Incorporation of the newly clothed monk in the Community, when the Celebrant laying a bare wooden cross on his shoulder gives him the kiss of peace with a formal and solemn declaration of the Candidate's new relationship with God and community as covenants which he has made:

In confirmation of these covenants which you have made
and confessed before God and His holy angels,
and all this priestly brotherhood,
in the bond of true love we give you peace in the Lord.

God's Covenant in which the Candidate is called to share should be related to the New Covenant instituted by Jesus on the eve of His passion, when during the Celebration of the Passover:

He took bread, and after saying the blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples with these words: Take this and eat; this is My body. Then He took the cup, and having offered thanks to God, He gave it to them with these words: Drink of it, all of you. For this is My blood, the blood of the New Covenant, shed for many for the forgiveness of sins.

The Institution Narrative, as it is recalled in the Anaphora of the Qurbana, is still more explicitly related to the Paschal Mystery as a whole by the words chanted by the celebrant and responded to, twice, by the Amen of the Congregation:

When Your Son became man without change for our sake and came to the Cross, before His life-giving sufferings, He took bread in His holy hands, said the blessing, sanctified and broke and gave it to His disciples saying: Take, eat, this is My body which is broken for you and for many and given for the forgiveness of sins and for eternal life.

People: Amen.

Likewise, after supper, He took the cup, mingled of wine and water, said the blessing and sanctified and gave it to His disciples and apostles saying: Take, drink from this all of you. This is My blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of debts and for eternal life.

People: Amen.

In this light, when we recall the prayers which preceded and accompanied the Mystery Initiations, we realize that the monastic charism is equally related to the Eucharist. The covenantal relationship which it creates is an actuation of the Covenant sealed by the broken body of Jesus and by the cup of His blood, as He Himself revealed to His disciples. The monastic charism therefore leads the monk and prompts him to a deeper sharing in Christ's passion and death, yet also in His resurrection and glorification. At his Clothing, the monk is endowed with a distinctive charism to make his participation in the New Covenant the sole and exclusive pursuit of his life.

The monk's sharing in the new creation brought about in, and by Christ, is the fruit not only of his walking in the footsteps of his Master but also of his intimate union with Him. This requires from him a participation in Christ's work, which is obtained by accepting suffering like Him, even for doing good, by drawing near to Him, by doing His will as He did the will of His Father, even by drawing life from Him as Jesus draws life from His Father.

The monastic charism bears these two distinctive marks of Christ's work, of His mission and of His life: on one side His passion and death, and on the other His resurrection and glorification, culminating in His gift of the Holy Spirit. The monk's summons to share in Christ's sufferings is already revealed in the first Mystery Initiation when he is identified as 'a holy lamb of God'. The cutting of the hair signifies that he has to get rid of all sinful habits. The stripping of his clothes indicates that he is expected to put to death whatever in him is earthly. All these will be actualized through his active involvement in the spiritual warfare.

The monks call to share in Christ's resurrections and glorification obtains manifold expressions. Fundamentally,

He is set apart for the Holy One,
to draw near to the Godhead,
to be of unvariable cheerfulness in His service,
in uprightness and purity of heart,
and enkindled with the fervour of love,
for the praise of the Adorable Name of the Godhead.

In the Sedro Christ, who is addressed as the Remitter of debts and Forgiver of sins, as the Wisdom and Radiance of the Father, is asked to make the Candidate worthy of divine mercy, of the pardon of sins and of seeing Him with unveiled face.

At the end of the celebration, the Rish Dairo prays for him to the Lord:

Let him live for You alone
and fix his gaze on you.

This is not that the Rish Dairo forgets the natural restlessness of the human mind for in the prayer before the tonsure addressed to Christ, he had asked,

In Your compassion keep from him constant preoccupation
with the anxious movements of the mind.

But he is expected to fulfil His Lord's commandments joyfully and to carry His cross cheerfully, as he is strengthened with the whole armour of His Holy Spirit. But, in His otherwise stern exhortation the Rish Dairo uses persuasive words:

Wait for the Lord Your God;
keep his way, and He will lift you up
to inherit the fertile land,
while you apply yourself to humility,
patience, gentleness, obedience, kindness,
good hope and with and above these true love
which is the perfection of the Law and the Prophets.

The intimate and existential bond between passion and glorification, death and resurrection is most beautifully expressed in a prayer of the Community in favour of the Candidate, already quoted, but truly worth quoting again:

Christ, Bridegroom who betrothed the human soul to Yourself,
and saved it by Your blood,
and freed it by Your Cross,
and made it beautiful by the abundance of Your ordinances,
and promised it life eternal,
this soul which is betrothed to Your crucifixion
give it to do good works
and make it worthy of the bridal chamber,
halleluia, halleluia.

The marriage metaphor already used by the Old Testament prophets to express the intimate nature of God's relationship with His people, is applied by Jesus to Himself in the Gospel;

The Bridegroom's attendants cannot mourn (fast)
as long as the Bridegroom is still with them.

They cannot fast because with the coming of the Bridegroom the messianic age has dawned. The Messiah's coming brings joy to the world.

But in the Book of Revelation to John, the metaphor of the marriage of the 'Lamb who has been slain yet stands upright' with His people, 'the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God' marks the consummation of time.

Conclusion

**What then is proper to the Monastic Charism in the
Antiochean Tradition?**

While the main features of the Mystery of Baptism are: the exorcism accompanied with the neophyte's renunciation of Satan, his confession of faith in Christ and in the teachings of the Church, the new birth for divine adoption, and his growth to a perfect age, "That after a quiet and peaceful life he may be worthy of a good and Christian death", the covenantal relationship of the monastic charism is about a more radical discipleship of Christ, a drawing near to God, to recount all His wonders. It prompts the monk to configuration and confirmation to Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit.

A Covenant

By the Sinaitic Covenant, as mentioned in a previous section, Israel entered into a specific relationship with God. They became "a chosen race, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, a people to be His personal possession, to sing the praises of God", as Peter (1 P. 2:9) quotes this text of Exodus (19:5) applying it to the Christian reborn from the World of God. Equally, and more so, the monk is one who is set apart for God in holiness, in an unblemished way of life, in order to draw near to Him. His covenantal relationship is a fruit of the New Covenant of God in Christ, the Everlasting Covenant instituted by Christ, at the Last Supper, on the eve of His passion:

Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them saying: This is My body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me. And likewise the cup after supper, saying: This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood (Lk 22:18-20).

In his First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul recalls the original Last Supper as a teaching that he had learned from the primitive community and had faithfully handed over to them:

Jesus on the night when He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said: This is My body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of Me. In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying: This cup is the New Covenant in My blood. Whenever as you drink it, do this as a memorial of Me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes (11:23-24).

As the blood of the animal victim united the partners together in one relationship, so the blood of Jesus is now the bond of union between the covenant parties: God the Father and the believers.

An Actuation of the Paschal Mystery

The priority and pre-eminence of God's part in the monastic covenant rests on the Paschal Mystery, Christ's passion, death

and resurrection and His gift of the Holy Spirit to His disciples. It is this which appears already clearly in the Liturgy of the Word, when the Candidate, in a deep movement of repentance prays for obtaining mercy and for being renewed 'by the breathing of the Holy Spirit', or when the Community prays:

Christ,
Bridegroom who betrothed the human soul to Yourself,
and saved it by Your blood
and freed it by Your cross,
and made it beautiful by the abundance of Your ordinances,
and promised it life eternal,
this soul which is betrothed to Your crucifixion
give it to do good works
and make it worthy of the bridal chamber.

And when we come to the Mystery Initiations, the imagery, the symbols and the prayers – each of these in their own way – relate to the Paschal Mystery and the monk's configuration and conformation to Christ.

At the sealing, the branding of the sign of the cross on his forehead marks him out as a 'holy lamb of God'. In the first part of our commentary, we have noted how this signation blends the image of Isaiah's servant of the Lord who bears the sin of many and intercedes for the rebellious, with the Passover Lamb of Exodus 12. In the Book of Revelation it is the lamb sacrificed for the salvation of His people, who still bears the wounds of His passion but has triumphed and therefore stands upright.

The prayers which accompany the tonsuring have several references to the signation of the cross as a token of victory against all deceits of evil spirits:

May Your seal protect him and the Mystery of Your Cross make to flee from him all inimical power, that he may be pure and without stain.

And when the Candidate is actually tonsured the Rish Dairo declares emphatically:

N... is tonsured as a sign that he leaves behind him with this dead hair of his head all evil habits.

More emphatically still, at the stripping and clothing, when he borrows the words of Col 3:5-9 and Eph 4:22-24, to pray:

May the Lord take off from you the old man
which is corrupted by sinful desires.

May the Lord clothe you in the New Man,
renewed in the image of his Creator,
in uprightness and true holiness.

This refers to the incorporation into Christ, the New Adam, the head of a new humanity, and the forming of Christ in us, as Paul wrote to the Galatians (1:19).

The Paschal Mystery is further evoked in a pictorial way when the monk is given the last articles of his dress. While the outer garment is put on him as the robe of glory, the pledge of the resurrection and of the life to come, the headgear is related to Christ's crown of thorns as well as the helmet of salvation and the crown of joy:

May the Mighty Power who, out of love,
descended from the heavenly heights
and received a crown of thorns, an example of affliction,
endow you with true goodness and patience,
and place on your head the helmet of salvation,
and the crown of joy, and the shield of innocence
by which all hurtful inimical forces are put to shame.

The monastic covenant is so to say ratified by the last Mystery Initiation, the holy bath which confers on him the remission of sins through the communication of the Holy Spirit. By these the monk becomes worthy to labour in purity and holiness. He gives thanks for the salvation he has received, by which God has visited him in truth, while the Rish Dairo prays that the pledge of the Holy Spirit may be preserved in him until the day of recompense.

The Spiritual Warfare and the Wedding Feast

Monachatus, as Moses Bar Kepha calls it in his homily, 'the monastic charism or monkhood, is an awakening to a higher life manifested by setting oneself free from worldly entanglements, a dissociating oneself from worldly concerns to commit oneself

to higher pursuits in life. This is described in the Church's celebration of the Clothing of the Monk "as breaking the fetters of the world... to draw near to God". And it is mystically shown forth and realized by the Mystery Initiations: the sealing, the tonsuring, the stripping and clothing, and the holy bath.

Moses Bar Kepha tells us, 'The definition of monkhood is the vehement curbing of nature'. And, in truth, the prayers show much concern for the spiritual warfare. Indeed, the monk still considers himself as a creature of dust, a sinner. But by repentance and by his longing for drawing near to God, he becomes worthy of His mercy, and of the pardon of sins. He even longs for seeing the Lord with unveiled face.

Although he has joined "the flock of spiritual sheep", he is still exposed to suffer from his brethren or from temptations falling upon him from Satan through wicked men. He remains subject to the unseen warfare, exposed to snares and all wicked devices of the Adversary. In these temptations and trials he must cling to Christ, wait for the Lord, his God, while applying himself to humility, patience, gentleness and obedience. But in all this he is supported by the Lord, committed as he is to draw ever closer to Him and to recount all His wonders, he is saved from all harm. The Lord rejoices in him and he rejoices in his Lord, anticipating here below the life which does not pass away. Strengthened by the armour of the Holy Spirit, he remains unconquered by Satan's hostile actions. A pilgrim on the royal road of God's Kingdom, he becomes the recipient of the affluent streams of the Lord's everlasting mercies. In all this he remains betrothed to the Cross for this is the way of true discipleship of Christ. 'Whoever does not carry the Cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple'.

This following of Christ is not confined to imitation of Christ, it leads to close union with him, to a spiritual marriage. Christ the Bridegroom betrothed the human soul to Himself. He gives salvation to the soul betrothed to His crucifixion. He gives it to do good works and makes it worthy of the bridal chamber. The Sedro which introduces the tonsuring, 'the sign that he leaves behind him all evil habits', describes him as a young bridegroom entering the indestructible marriage chamber – also called marriage chamber of incorruptible light – full of joy, as

he is to be seen in the Lord's presence at the feast which is full of joy and gladness, to offer praise and thanksgiving without ceasing.

The Angelic Life

The Church of the Antiochean tradition celebrates her prayer in an unbroken communion with the angels, the prophets, the apostles and the saints. To the angels is entrusted the heavenly worship, but the Church on earth renews unceasingly her communion with them. All her prayers are framed within the praises of the Seraphim – the Fiery Ones – heard by Isaiah during his vision of the Lord of all cosmic forces in the temple, singing: Holy! Holy! Holy! In the Revelation to John (4:6) the same praise is attributed to the Cherubim – the four Living Creatures of Ezekiel's vision of the chariot of God. Most commonly referred to in our Church's worship are the Wakeful Ones or Wakers, those who never sleep – a name also given to the Lord Himself, as in the Opening Prayer of the Night Vigil everyday of the year:

Awaken us, Lord, from our sleep in the sloth of sin,
that we may praise Your wakefulness,
O Wakeful One who do not sleep...

And make us worthy to praise You and bless You in holiness
with the glorious companies of the angels on high,
that You may be praised and blessed on earth as in heaven,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and for ever.

In the service of the Clothing of Monks the Church invites him to look at the angels as his models. When recalling the Son's work of salvation the Rish Dairo in his prayer attributes this teaching to Christ:

You delivered Your servants from sin,
and commanded them to behave like angels on earth.

He returns to this theme in a more solemn manner in the Concluding Prayer of the whole celebration. When offering thanks for the salvation which the Lord has earned for us, he acknowledges that we will then be joined with the angels, which will be a return to our first inheritance:

Lord Jesus Christ, Lover of Humankind, full of grace and truth, to You be praise, to You be thanks for all Your blessings, and for the grace of Your assistance to our sinful race... When by sin we had fallen from heaven to earth, You again, in Your love for Your human nature, with tenderness, made us ascend from earth to heaven, carrying us on Your shoulders. And You made us return to our first inheritance and joined us, earthly creatures, with the spiritual angels.

Committed to a life of prayer and humble service, of patience with forgiveness and gratitude to God in the heart, the monk feels prompted to recount unceasingly the wonders of the Lord in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.

The Prophetic Life

As the monastic life anticipates the Kingdom to come, it takes on a prophetic quality. This is further confirmed by the monk's models and teachers who are the great figures of the Economy of Salvation in the two testaments. Abraham for his great renunciation which was to make him a blessing for all nations. The Nazirite, for his restraints and abstinences inspired by a sense of consecration to God. Samuel dedicated by his mother to the service of the Lord in the shrine containing the Ark of the Covenant. Ben Sira who taught that he who comes to the service of the Lord must be ready to be tested. Isaiah who reveals that he who has gone astray and erred far away from God can become an offering to Him, and Jeremiah who, in the dire distress caused by the exile of his people and the destruction of the holy city, did not fall into despair but waited on the Lord in silence, solitude and quiet. St Peter who reminds him of the need of being born anew from the Word of God, and Paul who exalts the new life as a life above all things on earth, a life hidden in Christ.

The Apostolic Life

The Church in her prayer, praises the apostles for proclaiming the Gospel in the four quarters of the earth. This was the mission solemnly entrusted to them by her Lord, a mission for which He promised to endow them with spiritual powers as casting out demons, speaking new tongues, remaining

unharméd when treading on snakes and scorpions, and the healing of the sick by laying their hands on them. When the Rish Dairo, at the clothing of the monk puts on sandals on his feet, his prayer refers to similar powers for a similar mission:

May the Lord make you to be shod in preparation of the Gospel of peace... and give you strength from on high, that you may tread on snakes and scorpions.

And indeed, in East and West, monks are credited with remarkable missionary ministries. However, the apostles' mission was not only to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom. To them were entrusted the Holy Mysteries to be celebrated for the life of the Church, a celebration which, in the course of history, has become one of the great tasks of monastic communities. In her prayer, the Church often recalls with thanksgiving the debt she owes to the apostles on this account:

You entered within me and you enlightened me,
says the Church to the apostles.

You made me like the daughter of the King,
adorning me with the jewels of His precious Mysteries.

Glory to Him who at two festivals
distributed His gifts among the apostles.

At one festival He gave His flesh and blood,
and at the other the Spirit with power.

And to conclude let us briefly sum up the prominent features of the Clothing of Monks in the Antiochean tradition.

- 1 More than a profession of vows it is an ordination conferring monkhood, the monastic charism.
- 2 This charism is a flowering and a fructification of the divine adoption received at baptism.
- 3 That it is described as a covenant relates it, in a specific manner, to the New Covenant sealed by Christ's broken body and His blood, 'the blood of the New Covenant', as He confided to His disciples, when He instituted the Eucharist on the eve of His Passion,

THREE PARADIGMATIC PRAYERS
OF THE SERVICE OF THE CLOTHING OF MONKS
IN THE ANTIOCHEAN TRADITION

The Candidate

O God, Your love prompted You
and You created me from the dust.
You clothed me in Your likeness and Your image.
In the Paradise of blessedness
You gave me power to eat and enjoy,
But by my own will I fell from that height.
In Your mercy lift me up. Have compassion, have pity on me.

The Community

Christ, Bridegroom who betrothed the human soul to Yourself
and saved it by Your blood,
and freed it by Your Cross,
and made it beautiful by the abundance of Your ordinances,
and promised it life eternal,
this soul, which is betrothed to Your crucifixion,
give it to do good works
and make it worthy of the bridal chamber.

The Rish Dairo

May Your seal protect him, and the Mystery of Your Cross
cause to flee from him all inimical powers,
that he may be pure and without stain.
Like a young bridegroom
may he enter Your indestructible marriage chamber,
and with the chaste virgins,
with lamps shining with the oil of faith,
may he be seen in Your presence
at the feast which is full of joy and gladness,
and we will offer You a new praise and thanksgiving
without ceasing.

- 4 The reality of this new covenantal relationship is that the monk is set apart for God and called to a close participation in the Paschal Mystery, which he makes the sole and exclusive pursuit of his life.
- 5 Like the Paschal Mystery, the monastic charism bears the two marks – humanly speaking conflicting marks – revealed in Christ's work of salvation. On one side are His passion and death and on the other His resurrection and glorification, attested by His sending the Holy Spirit to His disciples.
- 6 The monk's participation in Christ's passion and death is pursued in his involvement in the spiritual warfare.
- 7 His sharing in Christ's glorification is obtained by the quality of his life spoken of as: angelic life, prophetic life, apostolic life, and, with God's grace, a foretaste here and now, of the eschatological manifestation of the Kingdom. This is described in mystical terms such as:

Be worthy of the heavenly blessings
which do not fail for ever and ever,
and of the marriage chamber of incorruptible light

- 8 Thus deeply rooted in the Paschal Mystery it secures the remission of sins which prompts the monk to live in purity and righteousness. It is nurtured by the Holy Eucharist and the workings of the Holy Spirit, who 'breathes on him, overshadows him, dwells in him .. He is called to enter the marriage chamber full of joy... to be joined with the holy ones... to draw near to God... to see Him with unveiled face... to live for Him alone and fix his gaze on Him.' We think here of Moses and his companions on Sinai who 'saw the God of Israel .. who actually gazed on Him and they ate and drank', the vision of God and participation in the sacrificial meal.

**HOMILY OF MOSES BAR KEPHA
ON THE CLOTHING OF MONKS**

Homily pronounced by Moses Bar Kepha,
read to those who are clothed in the Habit of Holy MonkhooD,
after completing the service of their vestition.

The Author

Moses Bar Kepha lived from about 813 AD – 903 AD.
He was born and brought up at Balad in Mesopotamia
and was educated under Rabban Cyriacus,
the abbot of the Convent of Mar Sergius,
which was situated near Balad,
He was himself bishop of Mosul, Ramman and Koniye
for the last forty years of his life.

He was a voluminous author.

He is said to have written commentaries
on most of the books of the Bible.

Of these the Commentaries on Genesis,
the Gospels and Pauline Epistles
are still in part extant.

An Ecclesiastical History is also attributed to him.
Besides these he wrote a number of homilies and treatises,
some of them of considerable length,
dealing for the most part with ecclesiastical matters,
such as ordination, chrism, tonsure of monks.
Amongst these are three dealing with Baptism.

From: K. A. Aytoon, The Mysteries of Baptism by Moses Bar
Kepha, compared with the Odes of Solomon. The Syrian Churches
Series, Volume VI, edited by Rev. Jacob Vellian, Kottayam,
1973, p. 1.

Faith: The Foundation of the Monastic Charism

First of all those who come to receive the habit of monk-
hood must have faith in the Father and the Son and the Holy
Spirit, and believe in the promises and assurances of the same
living God, which He promised to those who love Him: that
which no eye has seen, no ear has heard, nor did it ever enter

the heart of man, as the Apostle said (1 Co 2.9). For, if they have no true faith in the promises, vain is their labour. Anyone who does service, expects something from his work; and nobody works for others without expecting some return for his work; either in the hope of obtaining a visible return and reward, or an invisible one not passing away. Similarly the athletes who enter the contest and wage combat with all their strength in the hope of victory, strive after the reward promised to them. However those who look for rewards beyond, the life and happiness of the future, and strive with a sure hope of what they will obtain, do hard labour in the spiritual vineyard.

As we have already said, faith is the foundation for those who come to the monastic life, faith by which they believe in the promises and assurances given by our Good God, whose words are all truth and holy, as when He said: Come to Me, all you who are weary on account of hard labour and heavy burdens, and I will renew your strength. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me that I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your soul (Mt 11:28-29).

Discipleship of Christ the First Step

The true disciples heard this call and left the world and all that is in it, and followed Him. They freed themselves from the world of evil and the passions of sin. They put faith in the blessed word which proclaims: Everyone who leaves parents and family, house and fields for My name's sake shall inherit everlasting life (Mt 19:29). On account of His true promises and infallible assurances, those whose minds had been enlightened and received the help of grace, left parents and family and took up the cross and followed Him, according to the injunction He gave: He who does not carry his cross while coming after Me cannot be My disciple (Lk 14:27). The cross here means mortification of the things of the world, disgrace, shame and persecution from people.

A Discipleship involving hardships, disgrace, alienation from family

When the disciples heard these words and believed them to be true, without any fear they set out on that narrow and straight road, leaving for the sake of His Holy Name and of the good rewards He promised, parents, brothers and relations, riches

and worldly possessions and all kinds of passing pleasures. They chose hardship rather than rest, disgrace rather than honour, relinquishment of acquaintances rather than nearness of relationships, the troubles of peregrination and of vexation from close relations as well as strangers. Nothing could separate them from the love of Christ, neither sword, nor fire, nor terrors and threats, nor all kinds of temptations that befell to them (Rm 8:35-39). They made their dwelling in deserts, on mountains and in caves (Heb 11:38), preferring them to the cities and the kings' palaces. As the beasts of the wilderness they fed on any kind of herb and drank water from the stream. They wore a poor garment and rough clothing, and chose the hardships of pilgrim or eremitical life.

The Unseen Warfare

Such are the things that must be considered, such are the ways of life that must be imitated, by those who seek the Lord and come to the monastic life in response to His promises. Let them not come to religious life as to a life of ease or with a double mind. They should rather remember the word of Scripture which says: My son, when you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for testing (Si 2:1). Do not come to God with deceit in your heart (Si 1:30). Come to Him bravely, like a courageous soldier who joins battle so as to defeat his enemy. For our adversary, as it is written, like a roaring lion is prowling round seeking for someone to devour (1 Pet 5:8).

This warfare, beloved, is not with flesh and blood but with the rulers and powers of darkness, as the divine Apostle taught us (Ep 6:12). As those who stand in the arena of battle do not leave their armour, nor sit down to rest or sleep, but remain vigilantly on attention all through their encounter lest they be wounded by their adversaries, so must the monk be clothed in the habit which is as the breastplate or cuirass put on by a soldier. On his head is the cap which stands for a helmet. His outer garment is the symbol of hope. Let his vigilant mind be like a sword and a spear which annihilate his adversaries. Let him not relax or be negligent, even only a single moment, because the Enemy does not sleep nor relent from fighting. He even wages war with monks more than with other people because they keep their soul for God and are clothed in the habit of combatants.

The demons fight against them, alluring them with pleasures of the flesh and other foul passions, and make them seek eagerly these passing enjoyments.

The Path to Victory

However when they see the monk vigilant and well on his guard, assiduous to fasting, to prayer, to vigils, scorning the worldly enjoyments and delights, cautious and diligent in keeping and fulfilling all the life-giving commands of Christ God, the demons are defeated. They are put to flight by Him and scattered, like the Egyptians who were drowned in the sea by the power of the prayer of Moses and Israel, his people, a prayer of the heart.

Therefore, see, beloved, as you have readily offered yourself and have been clothed in this holy habit, bending your neck to the gentle and sweet yoke of Christ God, rise earnestly, watching over yourself, work with purity of intention and gentleness, understanding and believing that your work is offered to God and that the reward will come from Him, your recompense, on the great day of judgement, a judgement of divine equity.

Remembrance of God's Judgement

Consequently, dear brother, always remember that you will have to stand in God's fearful tribunal, do not forget the river of fire awaiting the prevaricators and the demons, the gnashing of teeth, the outer darkness, the hands and feet in chains, the unavailing lamentations, the interminable troubles, the coming intolerable confusion when all evil actions of those who committed them will be revealed.

Humility and other Virtues at the School of Biblical Saints and the Monastic Fathers

On account of all these, dear man who have offered yourself for the service of God, you must by all means have true humility, and above all in the heart, so that, as it is written, you may think of yourself only as dust and ashes and as vermin (Gn 18:27; Si 17:31; Jb 25:6; Ps 22:6; Is 41:14), and that you are the meanest and most contemptible of men. Meditate constantly on the lives of the saints and imitate them. Learn humility from Moses, who while he was greater and

superior to all (Dt 34:10) was more humble than all others in the heart (Nu 12:3). Above all listen to Christ saying, Learn from Me that I am gentle and humble of heart and you will find rest (Mt 11:29) and perfect peace. Learn purity and obedience from John, righteousness from Elijah, truth from Elisha, renunciation from the Apostles, patience from Job, forbearance from David and follow the examples of all the holy fathers.

Further learn the injunction given by God to a father who had asked Him, What should I do? And the answer came to him, Flee from the world and remain in silence and quiet. Hate, reprobate, reject, expel and avoid carefully perverseness, temerity, impurity, intemperance and drunkenness, worldly chatter and loud laughing, as well as calumny of the brothers. Remember and never forget that one must have true faith and truth in one's words and one's heart, and chastity of body. The monk should always be gentle and quiet so that he may be the dwelling place of God who said, To whom shall I look and where shall I dwell? but in him who is quiet and humble and who receives My word with reverence. Friendship with the world is enmity with God, as it has been written (Jm 4:4); because you cannot serve two masters, as the Lord Himself said: You cannot serve God and mammon (Mt 6:24).

Prayer for God's Grace and Fidelity to the Monastic Observances

Therefore, O monk, always remember these commandments and pray, cry out and make supplication day and night, asking God to come to your help, that He may give you assistance in your contest; for without God's help virtues cannot be practised. Have kindness for all, true love, compassion and gentleness for all the brothers with whom you live. Keep faithfully all rules and holy monastic observances, as you were instructed during your monastic formation, lest you be the cause of the abolition of one of the rules established by the fathers for which you will be reprehended in Christ's tribunal, on the fearful day of judgement.

Always run at the sound of the bell repeating to yourself the word of the Psalmist: I rejoiced when they told me, we shall go to the house of God (Ps 121:1). Go with joy and fulfil your service with your mind devoted to God and attentive to the books which are read. Lower your eyes to the ground with modesty

and gravity, lest by looking here and there your mind be distracted and you gather nothing from your prayer. Be further joyfully obedient and follow the directions of your spiritual father and of the elder whom you choose as your guide in this holy life.

In the Assurance of God's Grace

God's grace will be with you and all of us, because we also pray for you, and we turn to Christ Himself that He may be your helper, and deliver you from evil, be at your side, guard you and comfort you. And may He bless your monkhood, and keep and guard your holy habit free from stain, drawing you into safety from the evil snares of the Adversary and his flaming arrows (Ep 6:16). And as you keep His commands, may He strengthen you that you always do His will.

The Four Ages of the Monastic Charism

Understand now, my son, and with you all those who listen here, what is the monastic charism and the principles of its way of life. The monastic life is older than the clothing in the monastic habit, because in ancient times there was yet no habit, though quite a few lived the chaste monkhood in their life: Henoah, Noah, Melchizedek, Moses, Joshua bar Nun, Elijah, Elisha, Jeremiah, Daniel and many like them. Though in their time the habit was not given they nevertheless lived in continence, in abstinence, in uprightness, justice and holiness; and quite a few of them kept virginity in the body.

And where Christ the Saviour of all appeared, John the Baptist, the Holy Apostles and the Evangelists and their followers were endowed with the same holy monastic charism and, with it, lived for God.

Then the Lord God Himself together with other graces gave this habit, the dress of the monk in the time of Anthony the Great. And all those who wore it and were worthy of it were called monks and the houses where they lived, monasteries, words referring to the austerity of their life.

Monastery and Monk

Monastery (dairo) is understood as sheepfold (t'ioro) a self-contained place, not a city, nor a town, but a spiritual fold. Just as the sheepfold protects the sheep from the wolves, similarly the monastery protects the spiritual sheep from the

spiritual wolves. Monk (dairoyo) means one who lives in a monastery, (t'ioroyo) one who belongs to a monastery and therefore does not reside in a city or a town, not a city dweller nor town dweller.

Definition of Monkhood and Meaning of the Mystery Initiations

The definition of monkhood is, vehement curbing of nature. Indeed the monk must always check nature, fight against and reject all that nature seeks according to the flesh, restraining the body by fasting, prayer, vigils and divine office.

By **the stripping** by which he is stripped, he who comes to become a monk and puts off his old garment, gets rid of and puts off the old.

By **the outstretching of his arms** in the form of a cross he shows that he follows Christ God who stretched out his hands on a gibbet.

When he says, **I wish to draw near to God**, he gives testimony about himself that he has run spontaneously to take this holy yoke without compulsion.

When he is sealed by the celebrant **with the sign of the cross** on his forehead he becomes dreadful to the evil demons who take flight at the sight of the adorable Cross.

The tonsure also shows the marvel that he has cast away the mortality attached to sin.

Realize this, O monk, and know that by the change of your dress, once you are **clothed in the habit**, you have to change your worldly ways for a good and spiritual way of life. By the austerity of your habit you are expected to be in constant mourning so that you may attain the great beatitude proclaimed in these words, Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted (Mt 5:5).

The hood which is a spiritual helmet, signifies the mockery and derision which you will have to suffer for Christ who said, Blessed are you when you suffer insults and persecution for My sake (Mt 5:11). Further your hood narrow at the top

and broad at the end, signifies that the beginning of our life is straight and narrow, but later it brings relief and rest.

As for **the girdle or belt**, it tells you to be ready for battle with the devils. Indeed, just as those who are about to wage battle in bodily combat courageously stand wearing their armour, similarly the spiritual combatant, having his loins girded with the spirit, must always be, as our Lord said, Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning (Lk 12:35). Further the belt also signifies the abstention from passions of married life and fornication, which are seated in the loins. Hence the monk does not undo his belt neither by day nor when sleeping at night.

By **the sandals** which the monk who receives the habit wears is signified that he starts anew to proceed on the way of sanctity, so that he may trample on the powers of the devils who have been described as serpents and scorpions.

By **the cross** which he carries on his shoulder he shows that he further dedicates himself to fulfil the commandment of Christ who said, Take up the cross and follow me. And as Christ carried the cross when He was led out Jerusalem, similarly the monk carries the cross of shame while leaving worldliness.

And again **the washing of his feet** with water signifies that he is purified from the dirth and gall of sin and set free from the poison of the spiritual dragon. And as the feet of the holy Apostles were washed in the room of Mysteries by our Saviour to be sent to proclaim the gospel in the world, so also is the monk whose feet are washed in this divine Mystery.

By the peace which is given him by all brothers is signified the peace of the heavenly powers rejoicing over a sinner who repents.

Concluding Doxology

Knowing these Mysteries, we all give glory to Christ God and to His Father and to His Holy Spirit, for by Him all the Holy Mysteries are fulfilled, as it appeared clearly to the eyes of many of the holy fathers. They saw, testified and said that

the Spirit whom they saw coming down at baptism on the baptized, that Spirit they saw descending manifestly on the monks; at the moment they were clothed in this holy habit.

Secondly, therefore, and thirdly and perpetually, let us give glory to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, to whom be glory and on us His mercy for ever and ever.

Amen and Amen.

Thus ends the Service

Translated from the Latin version of the Pontificale iuxta Ritus Ecclesiae Syrorum Occidentalium id est Antiochiae, Vatican 1941-1942, pp. 333-342,

The headings are ours

